



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

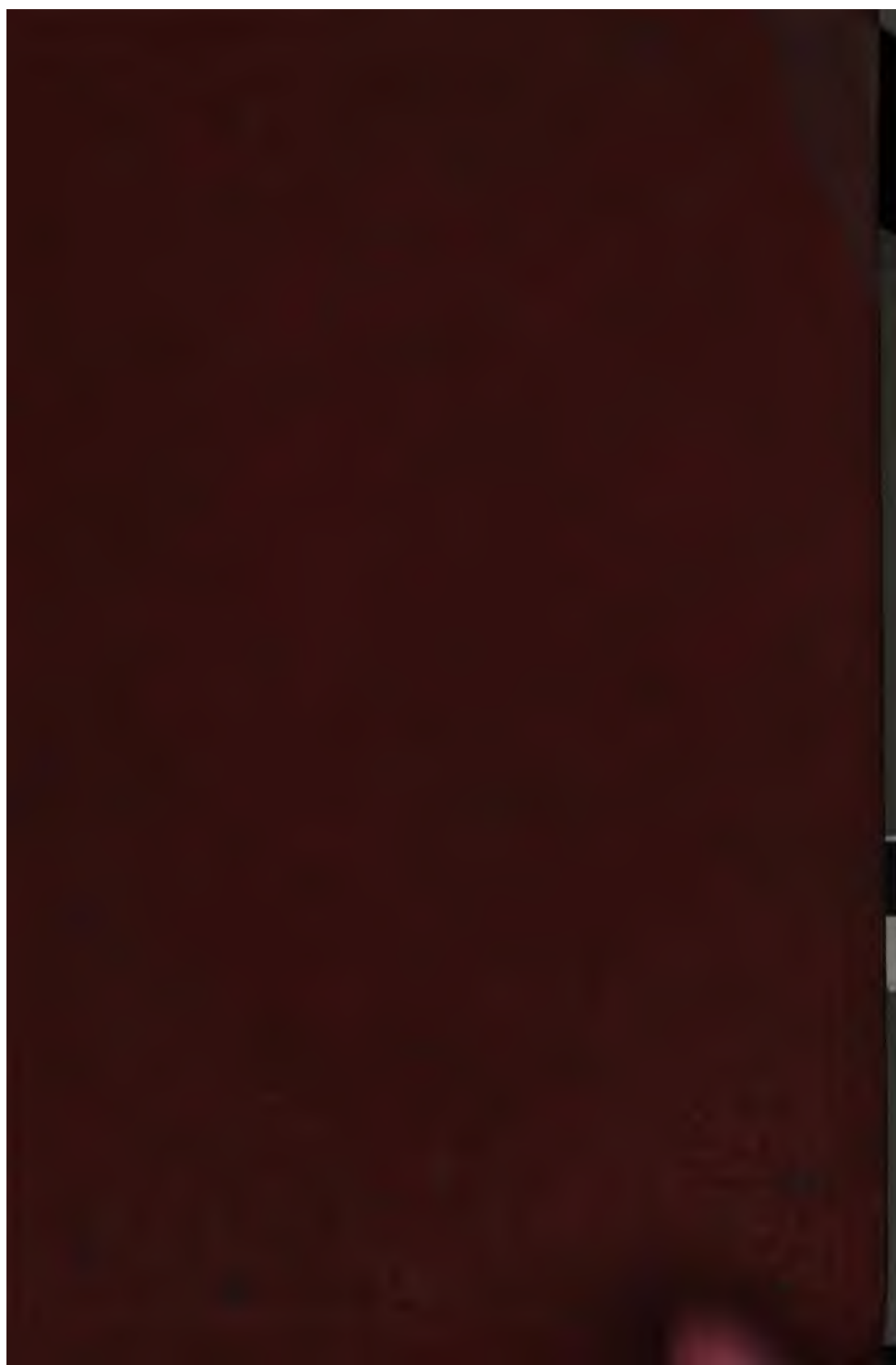
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

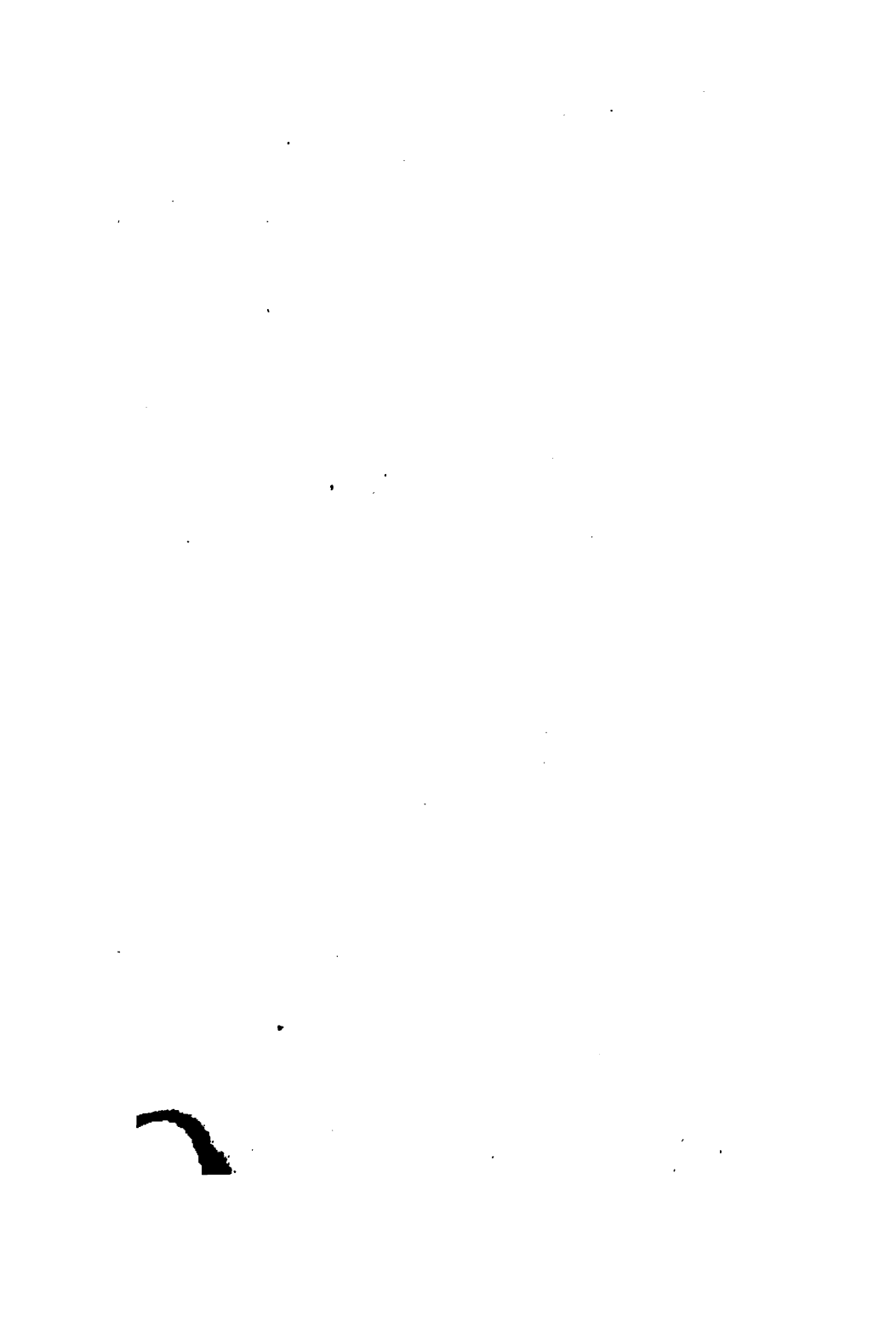
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600073439W





KATE RANDAL'S BARGAIN.

LONDON
PRINTED BY R. J. FRANCIS AND CO.
TOOK'S COURT AND WINE OFFICE COURT, E.C.

KATE RANDAL'S BARGAIN.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. EILOART,

AUTHOR OF

'THE CURATE'S DISCIPLINE,' 'JUST A WOMAN,' 'ST. BEDE'S,'
'SOME OF OUR GIRLS,' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



London:

SAMUEL TINSLEY,

10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1875.

[All rights reserved.]

251. b. 975

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. ON THE BEACH AT BARLEIGH . . .	1
II. MRS. JAMES'S LODGERS . . .	13
III. THE NEW BOY . . .	27
IV. A BOY'S FIRST LOVE . . .	33
V. KATHERINE RANDAL . . .	48
VI. BON PÈRE DE FAMILLE . . .	63
VII. A MOATED GRANGE . . .	82
VIII. HARRY CORDER . . .	93
IX. SISTERLY CONFIDENCE . . .	101
X. AT THE COMBE FARM . . .	113
XI. MRS. TOWERS'S LETTER . . .	142
XII. MR. RANDAL INDIGNANT . . .	157
XIII. IN RUSSELL SQUARE. . .	171
XIV. LIFE AT BARLEIGH . . .	186
XV. THE IDOL IN THE DUST . . .	197
XVI. MRS. TOWERS AT HOME . . .	221
XVII. MR. LAWRENCE HORTON . . .	239
XVIII. THE BARGAIN MADE . . .	257
XIX. MAKING THE BEST OF IT . . .	268

KATE RANDAL'S BARGAIN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BEACH AT BARLEIGH.

A LONG low beach, stretching out for miles. So firm to the tread, and so free from stones and shingle, so every way suitable, from its width and its length and its firmness, for a promenade, that the inhabitants of Barleigh, on the strength of their beach alone, were fast beginning to think their own little village the Queen of the Western watering-places, and to say that it wanted nothing more than two or three first-rate hotels, another row or so of lodging-houses, a pier, and a fashionable doctor to recommend the locality, to make

it eclipse every other place for sea-side sojourning from Torquay to Scarborough.

Meanwhile, all these good things being as yet in abeyance, Barleigh was simply a pretty, quiet little place, having, however, not only its wonderful beach and pure soft air to recommend it, but rural walks over a sufficiently pretty country in the interior, and its long range of "sand tots" which skirted the beach, and sheltered the village from the sea breezes. Pleasant places these "tots" for rambles, the undulations in them forming little sheltered valleys, where here and there bee orchids or rare wild flowers flourished, though in most parts the shifting sand was only held together by the roots of the coarse sea grass that grew sparsely on the sides and summits of the "tots." Pleasant places, but not nearly so frequented by strollers as the beach below them, especially the part nearest the church and

village; and this, the favourite promenade, was, one bright August evening, some ten years ago, unusually thronged, for Barleigh was "full," its lodgings were at a premium, and its landladies exultant and independent.

Barleigh was "full," but it was not only the chance visitors who were thronging the beach this evening, for Barleigh had its own little set of residents, and this was their especial time and place for exhibiting themselves to each other, and scrutinizing the arrivals in their village. They kept pretty well together, looking askance, with a little speculative curiosity, at the new faces they saw for the first time, or even on those with which a fortnight's acquaintance had made them comparatively familiar.

Barleigh, like greater places, had its exclusives; the Rector and his wife, in right of their position, were at the summit of the social tree, and seldom visited with

any but the two or three "county" families at a little distance. There were few in Barleigh would have aspired to the honour of even a morning call at the Rectory; the chief personage in the village, Mrs. Sims herself, had only taken tea there once; but her consequence, in her own eyes and in those of her neighbours, had been greatly enhanced by that one tea-drinking. The doctor was a man of no social importance whatever—a young beginner, struggling on as best he could, whose house was kept by one sister, while the other maintained herself by boarding and instructing small boys for £24 per annum, washing included. Barleigh was healthy, provokingly healthy, Mr. Williams sometimes thought, and the neighbouring farmers and villagers were a hearty, long-lived race, with a profound contempt for doctor's stuff. There were two or three old maids in the place, with great

pretensions and small incomes, with all of whom Mrs. Sims was on intimate terms. She had an immense respect for family. Mr. Sims had made his money in London as a pork butcher, but that was a secret which Mrs. Sims guarded in her own bosom with jealous care. How else would she ever have held her own as proudly as she did? She patronized Amy Williams, who kept the school, and insisted that, though she did keep it, she was not the less to be regarded as one of the select and visitable few of Barleigh. Her position as the sister of a medical man was the same, and she did not deserve to lose it because she chose to be independent of her brother. Mrs. Sims took the same tone with Mrs. James, the widow of a former curate of Barleigh, who now eked out an infinitesimal income by taking lodgers. The lodgers were to be ignored, and Mrs. James's social status as the relict

of a clergyman alone taken into consideration, according to Mrs. Sims; and her fiat was decisive in Barleigh.

Mrs. Sims found her own account in this good nature. The chief interest of her life was to be *au courant* with the news of the village, and well up in all that related to the last arrivals; and Mrs. James, who always had her rooms full in the season, and Amy Williams, who was quite ready to receive, as day scholars, the children of any visitors who might be staying in the place, kept her well acquainted with all that was going on—as far, at least, as they knew it themselves. Mrs. Sims was even now talking with Mrs. James upon the last new occupants of her drawing-room. Mrs. James's drawing-room was the dearest and most aristocratic apartment in Barleigh; there was always a little interest felt in the place about its inmates for the time being, but the interest,

just now, had taken an unpleasantly suspicious turn, to judge by the questions Mrs. Sims thought fit to put.

Mrs. James was a pale, small, slight woman, with a faint attempt at dressiness about her. Mrs. Sims was tall, stout, and florid, and, unless in the rare case of a visitor with an unusually gorgeous wardrobe, outdressed everybody at Barleigh. The evening promenade was the time in which she appeared most resplendent. Perhaps some of the rancour of her remarks was due to the fact that, for some days past, she had been eclipsed in her own sphere. Mrs. Sims could not well brook a rival near her throne, and silks and satins had been worn of late in Barleigh compared to which her own looked lustreless and dim.

Mrs. James, who was every way satisfied with her lodgers,—as a landlady might well be whose weekly bills were paid so un-

questioningly,—was in vain reiterating, with that persistence in which feeble women are sometimes so strong, her conviction that never before had her rooms been tenanted by a lady and gentleman more thoroughly deserving of the name. Mrs. Sims shook her head disapprovingly.

“Paying isn’t everything, dear Mrs. James. Some people have money that have nothing else to recommend them. He may be a gentleman—well, I don’t say anything against *that*. But the question is, what is *she*? Gentlemen don’t always take their wives with them when they go to watering-places.”

Mrs. James started back in affright. “Mrs. Sims, if you talk like that I shall never let my rooms again. Oh, dear! oh, dear! If I had had the slightest notion of anything of the kind, I wouldn’t have had them in my house for ten times the money.

And dressing as she does, too!—quite a credit to Barleigh, as far as that goes.”

“Oh, dress! that’s a matter of course in these cases,” said Mrs. Sims, who had known something of such “cases” in the days when her husband was in business. “Here they come! Now, Mrs. James, I put it to you whether a woman who doesn’t know how to put her things on better than that was ever born to wear a *moiré* that must have cost at least ten guineas; and just tell me what she means by painting her cheeks and pencilling her eyebrows.”

“Gentlemen sometimes marry beneath them,” said Mrs. James, ignoring the paint and the eyebrows.

“Not very often, now-a-days,” observed Mrs. Sims. “They make fools of themselves as much as ever, but not just in that way.”

“And the child is such a nice little fellow,” pleaded Mrs. James.

"I hope you don't let him play with your Freddy," cried Mrs. Sims; "I thought I saw the two together in the back garden yesterday."

"He's a nice quiet little creature, and sometimes Freddy—really, you can understand, Mrs. Sims, that I'm quite glad to have him kept quiet at times."

"And so are other people," said Mrs. Sims, significantly. "I think everybody in Barleigh knows when Fred is in his tantrums; but, for all that, I shouldn't let a son of mine—if I had one, that is—play with the child of people like those. You don't know what may come of it."

And Mrs. Sims looked as if the taint of illegitimacy was as catching as chicken-pox or measles. Mrs. James felt uncomfortable. The lodger's little boy was coming, the next evening, to take tea with Freddy, and she blamed herself for having a kindlier feeling

for the little old-fashioned child, who subdued her own turbulent youngster into something like quietness, than as a clergyman's widow she had any right to feel, if Mrs. Sims's suspicions were correct. It was a relief when Amy Williams, whose troop of boys were disporting on the sands under the charge of her little teacher, came up to them. But the sensation of relief soon passed away when Mrs. Sims, addressing Amy, asked her if she knew anything of the persons who rented Mrs. James's first floor.

"Nothing yet," said Amy, cheerfully, her quiet, sensible face brightening up as she spoke. "They called while I was out this afternoon, and asked for a prospectus, and promised to call again."

Mrs. Sims glanced meaningly at Mrs. James, and nodded. Then, in a mysterious whisper, she bade Amy take care, and, if she had the child, to be sure that her references

were satisfactory ; and Amy looked wonderingly from one matron to the other ; but Mrs. Sims was not disposed to be as communicative to Amy Williams, young and unmarried, as she had been to Mrs. James, a widow lady of a mature age, and Amy was, therefore, fain to be content with another admonition as to caution from one matron, and a whispered "I'd be guided by Mrs. Sims, my dear," from the other. After which she gathered her small flock together, and, marshalling them in decorous order, conducted them homewards.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. JAMES'S LODGERS.

MR. SIMS, though he had made his money in London, had invested a great deal of it in Barleigh, having done his best to convert the little sea-side village into a watering-place of some pretensions by erecting Brunswick Terrace and several other tenements, fit either for "genteel" lodging-houses or "desirable residences." He himself occupied the centre house in Brunswick Terrace; Mrs. James was his neighbour on one hand, Amy Williams on the other. If Mrs. Sims and he had been very great lovers of quiet, their house might not have been considered altogether eligible in its situation, with a boarding-school for small boys on one side,

and a lodging-house, kept by a widow lady with a son who made more noise than the whole school, on the other. But Mrs. Sims owned to liking a little life; and the pleasure of looking after the school on the one hand, and the inmates of the lodging-house on the other, quite made up for any little annoyance that either the boys or the lodgers might cause her.

Brunswick Terrace did not look directly on the sea, the small old church, with its churchyard half full of lowly graves, intervening. It might have been thought a not very cheerful locality by some, but nobody in Barleigh was of that opinion, the churchyard, in fact, having rather pleasant associations than otherwise, as a broad path led directly through it to the favourite promenade by the sea on its further side, and far more people went to the beach by this route than by the more circuitous one through

the village. Indeed, any one in Barleigh would have expressed not a little surprise had you said that the neighbourhood of the churchyard was gloomy, or its vicinity in any way undesirable.

Amy had enough to do, and so had her teacher, when they came home, in washing the pupils, and putting the younger ones to bed. Teaching was not profitable, and Amy could keep only one servant; consequently she had many things to do for the small people under her charge besides imparting "a sound English education," as stated in her prospectus, "with French and Latin." But the teacher, who was also her cousin, was very glad to help Amy, and to officiate as nurse as well as governess. She had had a hard life of it in other schools till Amy offered her a home. And Amy herself, strong, healthy, energetic, and twenty-four, was not disposed to complain

of too much work, or cavil at the hardship of her lot. So she put the children to bed as cheerfully as if, one way or another, she had not been working hard ever since five o'clock in the morning; and then sat down with Cousin Mattie to the one bit of solace in the twenty-four hours—the little frugal supper, which the two girls ate together quietly and alone.

The two cousins were a great contrast: Amy, tall, slight, dark, and pale, not exactly pretty, but decidedly “interesting” (according to Mrs. James, who, notwithstanding her life as a lodging-house keeper, still retained a faint tinge of sentiment); and Mattie, short, stout, with a round, chubby face, deeply seamed by the small-pox. Some of the elder boys—turbulent spirits from a great school at Bristol—had nicknamed them respectively “May-pole” and “Stumpy.” It is due to May-pole and Stumpy to say

that they were quite aware of their respective designations, but that the knowledge never ruffled their composure, or in the least influenced their behaviour to the boys to whom they were indebted for them.

They talked together over the troubles of the day,—the great enjoyment of the evening meal consisted in the liberty of doing so,—and then Amy spoke of the people at Mrs. James's, and of Mrs. Sims's warning against them.

“I'd have taken the child without any references if she hadn't said that,” observed Amy. “What can make Mrs. Sims so suspicious of people that Mrs. James tells me are the best lodgers she has had these two seasons?”

“Mrs. Sims has seen a great deal of the world,” observed Mattie, sententiously, “and I'd be guided by her if I were you, cousin ;

and there is something about these people I don't quite fancy. I hope we shall hear nothing more of them."

But another second doomed that hope to disappointment. There was a knock heard at the door,—such a knock as did not often resound at 6, Brunswick Terrace,—and immediately after Amy was informed by her one maid that Mr. and Mrs. Orville were in the parlour waiting to see her.

"The people from Mrs. James's," cried Amy, "and I in this trim! Who would have thought of their calling here at this time of night?"

She had taken off her walking dress, and put on an inferior one. She had need, poor girl, to be careful of her dresses; and it was not thus she would have liked to make her appearance before the parents of a prospective pupil; but Mattie re-assured her.

"You'll do, cousin; you're always nice;

and, somehow, I don't fancy these people are of such great account that you need mind so much about them."

It would not do to keep Mr. and Mrs. Orville waiting while she changed her dress; and therefore Amy went at once to them. She felt that her own worn black gown looked shabbier and dingier than ever as the lamp-light fell on the rich silk dress and lace of the lady in the best parlour. Mrs. Orville held her little boy by the hand—held him very tightly too. Amy noticed that. Was the lady afraid that he would be left there against her will? Was it only the father's doing that he was there at all? She looked curiously at the gentleman in question as the thought passed through her mind. He might be one or two and thirty, was about the middle height, fair, with light moustache and beard, well and fashionably dressed, with nothing remarkable about him, but an easy air of

present and future and in mysterious
 ways it seemed to be something
 more and better than he really was. As to
 his wife, a wife of her test dress, Amy felt
 it as normal and that she deserved that
 appellation. She was pretty, with a rapid,
 expressionless prettiness that even failed
 when she was and her dress was so that as
 to what it placed in such a locality as Har-
 mond. However, it was incumbent on Amy
 to look her with all the respect as the
 wife of a possible pupil and she was
 about to address herself to her when the
 gentleman spoke to her asking her if she had
 an immediate vacancy for another scholar?
 Could she spare the little boy standing
 back that night?

Mrs. Pender's caution as to references flashed
 through Amy's mind, and she hesitated. The
 gentleman, perhaps, understood her hesita-
 tion, for he continued, —

“ I propose to pay six months in advance ; and if you have no objection to undertake the entire charge of the child during his holidays, I should include that in the sum paid down as well as a certain addition for the expenses of his wardrobe. Shall we say twenty pounds for the first half-year ? and will forty pounds per annum meet your views ? You are likely to have him for several years, and will not be troubled with much interference.”

He had a brisk, good-tempered manner of speaking, but underneath it there was a hard metallic ring, that told of a keen man of business,—a man who would be willing to pay for whatever he had set his heart on, but would take good care not to pay one farthing more than the lowest current price, —a man who would drive a tight bargain for the pleasures he loved most dearly, and, even while enjoying them to the fullest, would

pause to count their cost, and ask if they were worth it.

The child's mother held his hand more tightly, while he, a small, delicate creature, not yet seven years old, clung to her. Amy foresaw a scene when the parting came.

"Write to me under cover to this address," continued the gentleman, handing Amy a card; "and you will address *to me* any communication that is necessary. But as long as the little fellow is in good health, I cannot see that there will be any occasion to do so."

"But if the child should be ill, sir?" urged Amy. "His mother—"

"I suppose you have a medical man in the neighbourhood competent to do all that is necessary, and you can forward his bill to me. My reason for asking you to take him under your charge on so short a notice is, that I have, not half-an-hour since, received

a telegram calling me to town upon urgent business. I had intended to place the child with you, but there would have been no immediate occasion had it not been for this. You will have a good stock of clothes with him, which will be sent round to-night, and if the proposal suits you, I have only to hand you over twenty pounds, and ask you for a receipt for the same."

He spoke politely, but with the promptitude of one who had no time to lose in making his bargain, and who felt that his offer was too good a one to be refused. It was not such a very brilliant one either. Mr. Orville knew how to get enough for his money when he offered forty pounds a year for the maintenance, clothing, and education of his child; but it was a large sum to Amy Williams. She did not quite like the transaction. The whole affair had a mystery about it which was distasteful to her. Still

the twenty pounds was a great temptation. She had not yet paid her last quarter's rent to Mr. Sims, and Mrs. Sims had given her several hints as to the desirableness of young people being punctual in their payments. Twenty pounds! It would satisfy Mr. Sims and set her right with the butcher, and no one need know that there was anything about this child different from other children. Then she looked at the little fellow. He was a pretty child, quiet and old-fashioned possibly,—well, quiet boys were a great blessing at times,—but bright and promising, she felt sure of that, and evidently fond of his mother, let her deserve it or not.

It took very little further consideration to induce Amy to write the receipt and receive the two ten-pound notes which Mr. Orville tendered her. Then she went towards the child and held out her hand. The little creature came to her, saying,—

"I said I wouldn't cry, and I'm not going to. Good-bye, mother."

Then there was a convulsive embrace,—right or wrong, Amy pitied the mother parting from her child. If he kept his tears down it was more than she could do, and the gentleman laid his hand—not so kindly as he might have done—upon her shoulder.

He unloosed the child's arms from her neck, and went towards the outer door, which Amy had rung to have opened for them. Then, as he stepped outside, the mother came back, and said hurriedly to Amy,—

"We start at seven in the morning to meet the express at Taunton. Will you let me come in at six to see him in his sleep? I may never see him again if I don't that once."

"Come in," answered Amy. "I shall be up myself to take you to him."

"Thank you. Good night. And oh! do,

do be kind to him." The words sounded like a wail from her lips; but before Amy could promise that neither care nor kindness should be spared her little charge, his mother had left the house, and Mr. Orville, in that good-tempered voice which could yet be so peremptory, was calling her to account for not being quicker in doing so.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW BOY.

“My goodness, cousin! what will Mrs. Sims say?”

The new pupil was in bed; a little white cot in Amy's own room, kept especially for very small or weakly pupils, having been assigned to him. His new guardian, having kissed him and bidden him good night, and left a light burning, that the child might not feel dull in a strange place, had just finished acquainting Mattie with all that had taken place between Mrs. James's lodger and herself. She showed her the two notes and the card which Mr. Orville had given her, and, looking at them, Mattie again observed, “My goodness! what will Mrs. Sims say?”

“I don't see that she has any occasion to say anything. I shall only tell her that

I have taken the child, and that his parents have paid me six months in advance."

"She'll find out the rest, cousin, you may depend upon it. There's no keeping anything from Mrs. Sims. And is this the address where you are to write to him? It sounds very like his own name,—'Mr. Lawrence Horton, Swithin's Lane, City.'"

"There's something that sounds respectable about the address," urged Amy. "I like its being in the City."

"I'm not afraid of the money, cousin, only, you know, it's not quite the sort of child one would like to have in the house. If things are as Mrs. Sims seems to fancy they are, it stands to reason he can't be the same as other people's."

"He can't be worse than Freddy James, and he doesn't look as if we should have much trouble with him."

"Well, I suppose it's the feeling of the

thing, cousin. There are some things that one can't fancy—black-beetles, and caterpillars, and—and—children like this; but, however, as we've got to be up by six, hadn't we better go to bed? But I should like to have a look at the new boy first."

Prettier, smaller, slighter than ever, "the new boy" looked in his little bed,—one of those fair-haired, rose-and-wax complexioned children, of whom pictures are sometimes made for earth, and angels more often for Heaven. He had been quietly crying in his little bed; the tears were still on his cheeks, and Mattie, for all her repugnance to "such children," stooped and kissed him. After all, she couldn't quite class him with the beetles and caterpillars. But her virtue avenged itself, for she turned round to Amy and said, in an indignant whisper,—“What a wretch his mother must be to hand him over to a stranger, as she has done to you!”

"Poor thing! I don't believe it's her doing. I fancy she can no more help it than the child can," said Amy.

"Poor thing, indeed!" retorted Mattie; "it's throwing pity away, cousin, to waste it on such creatures."

But Mattie was inclined to be a little more merciful in her opinion when, the next morning, at six o'clock, she saw a heavy-eyed, sad woman,—pale, it might be from the want of the rouge which Mrs. Sims accused her of wearing, and much too richly dressed for railway travelling, but still, in spite of all her finery, with the impress of a great sorrow in her face,—steal softly up to the bed where the new pupil lay, and kiss him so gently that he never woke, then kneel down by the bedside and bury her face in the clothes.

Was she praying? Did she dare to pray for the child whose existence was perhaps

her shame? Neither Mattie nor Amy knew, but they left the room, and waited outside. Let that woman be what she might, her grief was too sacred a thing for them to look upon. It was not long before she came out, and said, in a low voice,—

“I haven’t woke him; he’s still asleep. You’ll find him very good and easily managed, though his father did say that I spoiled him at times. Good-bye, and thank you for letting me see him.”

She held out her hand, then half withdrew it, as if afraid that it would not be taken, but Amy caught it in her own.

“I’ll be very kind to him, I promise you. I’ll do my very, very best never to let him feel the want of a mother.”

Then she felt her hand wrung passionately, and a low, murmured “God bless you!” drowned in convulsive sobs, broke from the lips of the new pupil’s mother as she left the house,

perhaps fearing that her absence should have been discovered. An hour after, and Mattie and Amy, while dusting and arranging the small best parlour, saw her departing in a hired carriage from Brunswick Terrace. She was painted to her very eyes, looked bold, defiant, reckless, and laughed—actually laughed—when Mr. Orville's foot slipped as he got into the carriage. But they saw, too, what he did not, the wistful, tearful look fixed on the window of the room where the new pupil was sleeping. But she arranged her dress with sufficient care in the carriage notwithstanding, said something in a light, careless tone to her companion, and so was borne from their sight towards the great Babel—just a waif to be swallowed up in its vortex, a weed to be trodden under the feet of its crowds, whenever it should please Mr. Orville to settle down into decorous habits and eschew the evil ways and follies of his youth.

CHAPTER II

A BOY'S FIRST LOVE

FIVE years had come and gone since "the new boy" had been placed under Amy Williams's care, and in the general order of things he was fast becoming the "preparatory academy for young gentlemen." But being slight and small in figure, quiet and docile in character, he did not appear so much out of place as a lad of a different calibre might have done. And on the whole Horace Orville had not fared so badly. Mrs. Sims, of course, had found out all about him, as Mattie had said she would—that is, all that there was to find—but Mrs. Sims took a very different view of the matter from that

which Amy and Mattie had expected she would do. She said Amy had acted like a sensible young person in not refusing forty pounds a year; and after all, as long as the bills for the poor child were paid, it was nobody's business if his mother had not been just what she should be. As to his father—well, gentlemen would be gentlemen, everybody knew that—and as long as there were painted hussies in the world to lead them into mischief, into mischief they would run as naturally as children would into puddles. At any rate, in paying for the child as regularly as he did, he was showing, according to Mrs. Sims, a due sense of his errors, and therefore his son ought not to be set down in the same category with the children of parents who could not or would not discharge their pecuniary obligations respecting them.

Mr. Sims took a fancy to the child, and had him out with him when he went to collect his rents or see after his men, for he still kept adding to the buildings of Barleigh and to his own rent-roll, and Mrs. James was very profuse in her invitations to him, and allowed him to have fully as much, and indeed rather more, of Freddy's society than Amy Williams quite approved of. Amy herself had kept her promise to the full, that she would do her duty by him. She had grown, in fact, quite fond of him — much fonder of him, her cousin Mattie often told her, than she had any business to be—all things considered.

Mattie was, by this time, three years married, and the mother of two children; and, let her lecture Amy as she might about her weakness to her pupil, did her best to spoil him herself whenever he came in her way, and the god-mother or aunt must have

been liberal indeed who would have surpassed Mattie in the cakes and apples she sent him after each vacation. "It was hard enough on the poor little unfortunate," she said, "to have no home to go to, without being tantalized by the sight of all the other boys' things, when they came back to school; and of course it was not to be expected that the wretched creature, his mother, would ever think of him in that way."

On the whole, Horace Orville's lot might have been cast in worse places, but the question now troubling his guardian's mind was how much longer he would remain under her charge, or if the responsibility of sending him out in the world was to devolve upon her, what would he be fitted for? She heard nothing from his parents; twice a year came a cheque for the stipulated twenty pounds, and she sent back a

receipt, with a formal account of her pupil's health and progress. That was all: if his mother were still living, she must either have grown indifferent to her child, or be compelled to satisfy herself with this poor half-yearly scrap of intelligence about him. But Amy had not much time to trouble herself with speculations either as to her pupil or his parents. Sufficient for each day were the cares thereof. Her school gave her quite enough to think about, especially as the teacher who had succeeded Mattie was by no means the helpful right-hand which that austere principled young person had been.

Horace was an old-fashioned boy for his years, quiet and feminine in his looks. A dreamy lad, with very little of the practical element about him—his deficiencies in arithmetic were a standing grievance to his instructress—usually gentle and still,

although now and then troubled himself, and troubling others, with fits of fretfulness, which Amy Williams ascribed to constitutional weakness, and Mattie to the old Adam, or Eve, which he had inherited from his mother.

“You couldn’t expect him, cousin,” she would say, “not to have something odd about him, and I think it’s a great mercy it’s no worse.”

Whatever the boy might think as to the difference between himself and his school-fellows, who went home twice a year, or oftener, wrote holiday letters, or received loving epistles from mothers or little sisters, and had fathers to talk of, he said nothing. Amy had dreaded questions on these points, and Mattie had said, “He will be always asking why he is not like other children, and how will it be possible to tell him?” But Horace never asked anything, and appa-

rently took it quite as a matter of course that he should spend his holidays at school, and know nothing of any one beyond Barleigh.

It was not stupidity or obtuseness that caused him to be so reticent. Always excepting the arithmetic, he was the brightest, cleverest boy Amy Williams had ever taught, and if he had not words, he had feelings on such matters. It was easy to see that by the manner in which he watched other boys read letters from home, or the wistful, almost envious look with which he regarded them when summoned into the best parlour to see friend or parent; but he kept his thoughts to himself with a strange reserve, which caused Mattie to set him down as the oddest child she had ever known, and Amy to wonder how much he remembered of his early life, and if either threats or cautions had been used to impress upon him the necessity of silence as regarded father and mother.

On another point, too, little Horace Orville thought his own thoughts and dreamed his own dreams, without taking any one into his confidence. Gradually, as the memories of his "bright, pretty mamma"—she had been bright and pretty enough to him, poor creature—faded, and only a dim, hazy image remained of all the rustling silks and glowing colours that made up his image of motherhood, another form took her place, and almost rivalled her in the tenderness with which the boy dwelt upon the new idol. It was a modified form of hero worship—it were sin to give so coarse a name as "calf-love" to the fond reverence with which, Sunday after Sunday, when the pupils of Miss Amy Williams were all duly marshalled into their pew, Horace turned his blue eyes in the direction where he was sure to find the face that had taken the place of his mother's.

If the owner of that face could but have been told in whose stead she reigned,—if she had but known that in her bright, proud, girlish beauty she had only by degrees supplied the image of some sin-stained, mire-smirched denizen of the London streets; and that the best and truest worship she had ever won, or would ever win, was that of a child whose wistful eyes had traced some resemblance in her face to that of the lost, fallen mother he was never to see again, — would her pride have had a lesson it might turn to profit, or would she have been cruel enough to shroud that fair face with a veil, lest it should be desecrated by a resemblance traced, however innocently, between her own unstained loveliness and the beauty that had only led the way to its owner's ruin? Very likely the last. There was not much ruth or tenderness known to Kate Randal in her youth; but, years

after, when she *did* know what she had been to Horace Orville in his childhood, she had grace enough to say, "So I was a comfort to you, boy? That is something to be thankful for. God knows whether I ever was, or ever shall be, a comfort to any one in all the world beside."

She sat—this object of Horace's mute adoration—nearly opposite to him. The pew she shared had been a grand one in its time, having once been duly cushioned and well supplied with hassocks and richly bound Bibles and Prayer-Books, and in one corner there was still the stove that was formerly supposed to warm the whole church, so that let who would be cold at the far corners, or in the gallery, the Randals had been always warm enough. But some churchwarden of levelling tendencies had insisted upon a new stove, constructed on modern principles, being placed in the aisle, "where all the

folk should have the comfort of it," and then when the Randals were up in London it had not been thought worth while to light the stove in their pew, and when they came back with altered fortunes nobody seemed to remember that it had ever been lit almost especially for them. The cushions and hassocks were so worn as to be scarcely worth the keeping, and the books, in some of which there were prayers for their Majesties King George and Queen Charlotte, were in want of fresh binding, so that the tablets on the wall, speaking of the virtues of sundry Randals long deceased and the benefactions one or the other had given to the poor of the parish, were a woeful contrast to the decadence of the family, at least as evinced by the manner in which they kept their ancestral corner in the House of God.

But this mattered nothing to little Horace Orville. In the old whitewashed church,

which was as dreary and ugly in its interior as most village churches are, where neither incumbent nor congregation have yet learned the meaning of the beauty of holiness, he saw that one fair face, and it made a bright spot for him in all the dull grey tints around, just as its remembrance was a pleasant resting-place for his mind all the week through. It was radiant in its girlish bloom and freshness, even if sad at times, as thoughts reflected themselves in it that had little akin to the grand old prayers the listless gentlemanly rector languidly offered up, or the string of commonplaces called a sermon through which he drawled.

Perhaps it was this very sadness which continued to interest Horace in her. What had she, Miss Randal, living at home with her own people—father, sister, brother—to repine at? He occupied himself, half church-time, by speculating as to the reason of every

change in the varying face on which he looked. Did Mr. Vining, the rector, bore her? Horace knew he very often bored him. Was she afraid it would rain before they got home, and so spoil that wonderful little bonnet? Was she angry with him for looking at her? and then, for at least two minutes, Horace would fix his attention on his own boots, and try to divert his thoughts from Miss Randal by counting the laced-up holes in his Balmorals; but it was impossible to keep his looks long from her, and again he found himself watching those bright unquiet eyes, and trying to pierce the secret of all the clouds and shadows of the face that should have been so full of joy, and yet was always joyless.

Miss Millicent Randal, the elder daughter, with two or three boys of various ages who taxed their sister's ingenuity to keep them in order, always came to church with the

object of Horace's admiration. Why Miss Millicent, though the elder of the two, always bore that designation needs not to be told just here. She seemed happy enough under her diminished honours,—happy enough though, by the side of her sister's changeful, troubled beauty, with its rich lights and shades, her own pale face and light-brown hair looked tame and plain enough. It was a good face, too, with a steady, honest outlook in the clear, grey eyes, but the features would have been commonplace had not their expression redeemed them; and, plentiful and neatly arranged as the hair was, no stretch of fancy could pronounce it golden, and it neither rippled nor waved as did her sister's. There was no glory or sheen about it for a poet to be charmed with or a child's eyes to dwell delightedly on, as Horace Orville's did upon Kate Randal's.

The boys she brought with her were verit-

able boys. They kicked their heels against the back of the pew, stared about them during the prayers, and slept through the sermon; smuggled into the sacred place peppermint drops and toffee, with which to solace themselves, and gave each other surreptitious nudges and pinches. Miss Williams, when she had time to spare from overlooking her own flock to watch Miss Millicent's smaller one, was scandalized by their behaviour, though there was not one of her pupils—with the exception of Horace, who had something else to think of—but admired it greatly, and would have emulated it if he had dared, being apt to speculate, too, whether—if by any happy chance Miss Williams should be hindered from coming to church, and the present teacher, who was much less energetic than Mattie, be alone left in charge—he might not at a humble distance follow the bright example set by the Randal boys.

CHAPTER V.

KATHERINE RANDAL.

It was an August evening; just as bright a one as that of five years ago, when little Horace Orville was first placed under the care of Amy Williams. Barleigh was again full, though more lodging-houses had been added to it, and the little promenade, now dignified by the name of the East Parade, was thronged with residents and visitors. Amy Williams was just coming home with her school, and Mrs. Sims, as radiant and effulgent as ever, was sauntering up and down the beach in company with Mrs. James, who was still her especial friend, perhaps because her subdued tints and faded gentility threw up in brighter colours Mrs. Sims's gorgeous apparel and florid bloom.

Altogether, the scene was very similar to that of five years ago; it had repeated itself in the cycle of years. Amy Williams was thinner, paler, and more worn-looking, and Horace was in jacket and trousers instead of knickerbockers; and Mrs. Sims, instead of scrutinizing a lady of doubtful character and questionable appearance, was passing her observations upon two whose antecedents and general propriety would bear the test even of her scrutiny. Miss Randal and Miss Millicent—I name them in the order of precedence which everybody who knew them adopted—had been to the village upon some small errand, and were now returning homewards by the beach. It was not their nearest way; but their home was some way inland, and the girls were glad to catch a glimpse of the sea, and vary their walk by returning along the shore.

They moved through the crowd quietly

and apart, though many eyes besides Mrs. Sims's were bent upon them. Here and there they recognized some one with whom they were slightly acquainted, and Millicent bowed with a shy, pleasant smile, and Miss Randal with a cold, distant courtesy; but they spoke to none till they came near Amy Williams and her school, when Miss Randal was attracted by the steadfast look of the slight, delicate boy whom she had noticed before as staring at her most persistently on Sundays. It was the first time he had ever seen her so near; her light muslin dress touched him, and he caught the faint perfume of her handkerchief. She had some flowers in her hand that had been given her at the house where she had called; one, a spray of mignonette, dropped near him. He stooped and picked it up, but did not offer to return it, standing with it in his hand, and looking as if he longed but dared not

ask if he might keep it. Miss Randal was in a gracious mood,—perhaps this mute, childish homage was not altogether displeasing to her,—and she laughed lightly.

“You may have it, my little man, and the rest too.” She gave him the others, and he took them eagerly. “It’s more than you deserve, though, for staring so in church,” she whispered. “I’m afraid Miss Williams doesn’t look after your manners so strictly as she should.” Then she turned away, and Horace remained in a flutter of delight and triumph. She had spoken to him,—she, his idol, his lady of romance! she had noticed him in church, and, for all her seeming chiding, he knew she was not angry with him for looking at her. Miss Williams was a little distance behind, and the boys were not kept in too decorous order while on the beach, and she had not witnessed this little episode; but some of

Horace's companions had, and they came crowding up to know what it was Miss Randal had given him. He showed his flowers with a little shy elation, and Jemmy Sanders, a boy of a vulgarly practical turn of mind, looked on them disdainfully.

"I thought it had been a tanner, or, at any rate, two or three browns,"—slang *will* creep into the genteelest of "Young Gentlemen's Preparatory Academies,"—"and it's nothing but that rot!"

Horace felt as if he should have liked to give Jemmy a thrashing,—there was an element of pugnacity underlying all his mildness,—but Jemmy was three years younger than himself, and to "lick him" would have been cowardly. Besides, he had an undefined feeling that Miss Randal and her flowers were not things to be fought about; therefore he contented himself with looking unspoken scorn at Jemmy, and strolled apart

with his precious blossoms. Luckily for him in this case, his schoolmates were all such mere children, or this shy worship of his might have been more roughly dealt with; and, perhaps, the very difference between their ages conduced to the shyness and reserve with which he kept his secret to himself.

Miss Randal and her sister walked on, and, turning aside from the beach, took a path which led them to the summit of the tots. They strolled on here, keeping as near the sea as the shifting, varying nature of the ground permitted, and, before they had proceeded very far, Millicent Randal said,—“You look tired, Kate; let’s sit down, and enjoy the sunset on the waters, and take a rest.”

Miss Randal flung herself down impatiently. “I think we’re always resting, Millicent. Do we ever do anything else? I’m sick of a rest which seems to wear my very soul away.”

Millicent Randal was by no means sick of rest, her share of it being much slighter than her sister's. She seemed to have come into the world to toil not merely for herself, but most unselfishly for every one around her. Rest never wore *her* soul away, and she was too thankful for a few minutes of it now to find fault with her sister's querulous words. She sat down in a spot where the coarse grass grew thickly, and pointed out another spot where it grew more thickly still, and where the undulations of the sand formed a natural arm-chair, to Kate, and then, taking off her hat, sat and looked at the wide expanse of sea stretching below her.

It was good for her so to look ; she felt that, though she could not have told wherefore. There was such a blessed sensation of repose and calm after the home troubles and cares that always beset her at The Grange ; and the still beauty of the scene was like a living

poem to her soul. She could not have told that in words. Since she left school, five years ago, she had never (out of the Bible) read a line of poetry. What had she to do with poetry—she would have asked—she whose life was so full of petty trials and small cares? It might have been well enough if she had had time for it, as would a great many other bright and pleasant things from which she was shut out; and she would have been the last to guess that the life she led, which was outwardly so poor and so ignoble, was yet, in its continual self-forgetfulness, its daily services to others, as true a poem as ever yet was set in verse, as full of beauty as any scene that ever rose before the poet's eye.

Other thoughts than the first blessed consciousness of rest came over the girl after a time, and a soft, tender smile stole over her face, lighting it up with something that was almost beauty. She had so little time for

quiet thought, and there was one to whom, when she had, it was pleasant to give that time.

She might rest, and enjoy the rest and the pleasant dreams it brought, but the calm sea, with the ships "floating on to their haven under the hill," and the sky stretching over all with its gorgeousness of crimson and gold till it seemed to sink into the world below, were lost upon her sister. Her eyes were turned from the sea, and she was looking back fretfully and almost enviously upon the Parade and the people on it strolling to and fro, children playing, and ladies conversing. She thought she could almost hear the murmur of their words and laughter, and was angry with them for their seeming happiness.

She was so miserable herself, and it seemed to her as if no one in the world beside had any cares to trouble them. She was not yet twenty, with health, beauty, a

safe if not a splendid home, a sister's love that outweighed many a mother's; and no great sorrow, no terrible heart-wrench had ever yet come to her, but yet Kate was sorely grieved, and resentful against fortune. Her dress was poor and plain. It was no matter that she looked like a queen (not of real life, where queens have little beauty to boast of) in it, she would have liked to be robed as a queen should be. Her life was one such as no Randal had ever led before. She was shut out from the society to which her birth entitled her, and the very beauty which might else have been such a priceless possession was only another source of annoyance, inasmuch as it was sheerly wasted on the unappreciating eyes of the rustics around her.

So she sat moodily and sullenly watching the scene on the Parade. What right had happiness to be given so freely to all around

her? What right? And yet this very happiness, which she almost grudged to others, she claimed as her own due. Providence—perhaps she would not have dared even to herself to use a yet more sacred name—had dealt harshly by her, given her so little, and lavished so much upon all these.

Well, she knew no better, and it is so hard to be wretched in one's youth. These cares and troubles were very real to her. She suffered as much from the privations her pride endured as another might have done from more material hardships. Worship and homage, admiring crowds and dazzled eyes,—these are the needs of natures such as hers, the stimulus which alone enables them to feel life worth the living. Of other sorrows than her own she had no conception, of griefs that time might bring, or love itself might cause, no thought. She had seen nothing of life but what a fashionable boarding-school had

shown her ; but she knew the traditions of her house, and that other women who had borne her name had been, at her age, the belles of the county, had turned heads by the dozen, won hearts by the score, nay, had queened it in the gayest circles of London, and been praised by royal lips ; and here she was wasting the precious summer days that would never come again, with no eyes to note the beauty that seemed likely to fade before it had been either envied or admired.

There was sorrow enough in the shifting throng below, if Kate Randal had but known it, sorrow such as might have stirred even her heart to sympathy. Three of the children who were running on the sands, and courting the tide as their playfellow, running as children do to meet the waves as they advanced, and then flying back in mimic terror, were brothers, all born deaf mutes. And the mother who stood near

them, watching their play. had a baby by her side. in the nurse's arms. and, though she tried her best to look as other mothers, the thought was never long absent from her heart whether this last little one would in time use articulate speech, or would its only utterance be such eldritch cries as its brothers sent forth? How that woman had prayed that *this* child at least might call her mother! How even already she was trying to distinguish something different in its baby wailings from those of its brothers in their infancy, catching at the veriest straws of hope that this child might be more favoured than the others! She was young yet, healthful and strong, might bring many more children into the world—surely, surely God would not perpetuate the curse which some ancestral sin or weakness had bequeathed upon all the innocent ones which might yet be given her. If but *once* from this last little

one's lips she could hear but one articulate sound there might be some promise for the others. At times, poor mother, it seemed as if to have heard it speak that word, her life would not have been too dear a price to pay.

There was a wife watching her husband in his last illness; it had been hoped that his soft, sweet native air might do something for him; it was the last resource, and it had proved hopeless. She knew it, though she was walking homewards by his Bath chair, trying to cheer him with some light talk; knowing all the while it could not be very long before she would have to go back to the children she had left and tell them they were fatherless. There was a widowed mother with her son, the last of all to whom she had given birth, and she had brought him there in that hope which is but another form of despair, thinking that it might be the soft western sea-breezes would do some-

thing for him. And he was going too. It needed no doctor to tell her that, who had seen so many go before; and a little while, but a little while, and she would have to face that loneliness whose blank, drear horror was even now casting its awful shadow on her.

Some one, I think it is Channing, has said, "God meant that we should suffer." True enough, if he spoke from his experience as a man, but the words would have come with ten times the truth and ten times the force, had they emanated from a woman's lips or pen.

And all this while, looking down upon the scene below her, with all its seeming gladness, and all the mystery of pain that lay below it, sat Kate Randal, thinking herself most miserable of maidens, most forlorn of earthly creatures, because county balls knew her not, and the fame of her beauty had not extended beyond Barleigh.

CHAPTER VI.

BON PÈRE DE FAMILLE.

TWO-AND-TWENTY years before this August evening, Frederick Randal, Esquire, of The Grange, Barleigh, did an extremely foolish thing for his own interests and those of one other person. He married—unhappily for himself, and much more unhappily for the young woman who became his wife. He had been living fast in London—so fast that he had outrun his purse and his health, and, in the hope of recruiting the one and inducing his uncle to replenish the other, by professing penitence for his past misdoings, and an intention of adopting an altered course of life, he ran down to a small village near the Lakes, too out-of-the-

way for either duns or fashionable friends to follow him.

But his uncle, at that time the master of The Grange, and standing *in loco parentis* to his nephew, was deaf to his appeals for assistance. If he had only betted, if he had only raced, if he had only gambled, as other men of his name had done, he might have helped him ; but he had not done these things as it was the wont of gentlemen to do them. There were ugly rumours whispered about Fred Randal at the clubs ; and it was said that he owed his embarrassments to his having attempted to rival certain adepts and beat them with their own weapons. His chosen associates had been men of more than doubtful repute, who had been content, while it served their purpose, to allow him to suppose that he could learn the secrets of such craft as they possessed, and even outwit those who taught him ; then, when he had paid

to the full for his teaching, suffered him to find out how valueless it was for the purposes to which he had hoped to turn it. His sojourn in the Cumberland village proved more wearisome than he had contemplated. His uncle took no notice of his letters beyond signifying, through his steward, that, for the future, Mr. Frederick Randal's allowance would be £200 per annum, paid monthly, the difference between that and his former allowance of £800 being set aside to pay his just claims and liabilities.

In spite of himself, Frederick Randal was to behave like an honest man. He chafed and murmured under the new character imposed upon him, and then, partly out of a desire to be revenged on his uncle, partly because time hung heavily on his hands, made love to Millicent Glyn, the daughter of the landlord of the little inn at which he had located himself. She was

a good, modest, sweet-natured girl, but with only a fair share of outward comeliness. In any other place he would never have deemed her worth a second thought; but here, without even the excuse of a transitory passion, he did this true, honest creature the wrong of making her his wife, announced his marriage in the *Times* and the *Morning Post*, not forgetting to state the vocation of his father-in-law, and wrote to his uncle, stating that he had thought it only right to marry in accordance with the position to which he had condemned him, and hoped that, if he visited the Lakes, he would at least, out of family feeling, give the Three Bells his patronage.

A year after her marriage, Millicent died in giving birth to a daughter. It was the best thing she could do, as she felt. She had paid dearly enough for the short-lived honour of being a gentleman's wife, and, as

she kissed her little one, moaned feebly, "Good-bye, my bairn; don't be long in following."

But the child whom its mother would so gladly have taken with her from the evil to come,—the child whom its father could so readily have spared,—throve and grew under the care of its maternal grandparents a healthful, vigorous creature, but peasant, Mr. Frederick Randal said, to the backbone; not a sign of blood or race in her.

Not of his blood, certainly. She was large, tall, and fair, the true descendant of the Cumberland yeomen from whom she came. "She favours her mother, purely," said the old people, fondly. Millicent Randal—they gave her her mother's name, her father leaving her completely in their hands—seemed likely to be Milly Glyn over again, in all, her grandparents fondly trusted, but her fate.

When his wife was buried,—Mr. Frederick Randal had just sufficient decency to stay to the funeral,—he repaired at once to The Grange, and, presenting himself before his uncle, told him that he was now free from the entanglement into which he had been in a measure driven by his unhappy position, and asked how long his banishment from civilization was to continue. Mr. Randal was taken by surprise, and his anger had had time to cool. He told his nephew he would take time to think of it, and, in the mean time, asked him to stay to dinner, and intimated that he might sleep that night at The Grange. The next morning, Mr. Frederick Randal showed what Cumberland had done for him by rising at seven and taking a walk in the park. There he met, as he expected he should do, a young lady to whom he had proposed eighteen months ago, and whose father, the late Rector of

Barleigh, had given him a very summary rejection; but the Rector had died eight months since, and his daughter was of age, and much better portioned than the daughters of even bishops are wont to be, inheriting a very fair fortune from some maternal relatives. What old recollections had led her to this place the girl scarcely knew; perhaps Mr. Frederick could have told her as well as she could have told herself; it was by no means the first time he had met her in that portion of the park on which the Rectory grounds abutted. She was fluttered by his unexpected presence, and it was not long after she had learned that he was now a widower, before he brought her to avow that, could she have had her way, the late Rector would have given a very different answer to Mr. Frederick Randal's proposal. Of course, before he brought her to make this avowal, she had been assured repeatedly

that the miserable and every way unworthy marriage into which he had rushed had been caused by sheer despair of obtaining the wife he would have chosen. Neither did Mr. Frederick think it necessary to tell her he had been a widower just ten days. Laura Clare knew just as much and as little of this man who sought her as most girls do of their lovers. She had been cautioned against him with ominous hints and significant frowns; but what did all this avail against her own feeling that he had been ill-used and misjudged, and that it was reserved for her alone to appreciate him rightly, and, in some measure, to redress the wrongs which he had received from the hands of others?

She was living at this time with a maiden aunt, a sister of her father; and as this lady knew very little more of the world than her niece, and about as much as she did by what is meant when people say a young man has

been rather wild, Laura was not likely to receive any serious opposition from her, and even if she had, it would have made little difference. Laura was mistress of herself and her twenty thousand pounds, so that Mr. Frederick Randal went back to breakfast with an excellent appetite, and in the course of the meal informed his uncle that he was an engaged man.

Mr. Randal did his duty in the matter. He called that morning on Miss Fanny Clare, and told that lady and her niece he did not consider his nephew one-half good enough for the latter; adding that such was the late Rector's opinion, and he had never shown himself a more sensible man than in entertaining it. Miss Fanny was shocked, her niece distressed, but the end of all was, that as soon as a decent time of mourning had expired for the late Rector of Barleigh—somehow no one ever thought of asking

how long a period had elapsed since the death of the poor peasant wife—Mr. Frederick married again, and Laura Clare became Mrs. Randal.

Unfortunately Mr. Randal fell seriously ill a short time after his nephew's return to The Grange; so ill, that one of the arguments his nephew used to hasten the marriage was, that if it did not take place soon, another death might render a further delay necessary. Therefore the wedding was rather a hurried, and a very quiet one, and in the hurry Mr. Frederick Randal quite overlooked the necessity of settlements, and became master not only of Laura Clare, but of her money.

When Mr. Randal recovered, which he did partially, he was furious with his nephew for this oversight, and insisted on its being rectified. Frederick promised compliance, and the family solicitor was directed to



make the necessary arrangements. But meanwhile, as his uncle was now well enough to be left, Frederick took his wife to London by way of spending the honeymoon, although they had been two months married, and somehow he never found time to run down and complete the settlements. And when, a year after his second marriage, his uncle died, there was no one to protect the interests of Mrs. Frederick Randal, and the children that might be given her.

She had begun, by this time, to wish that there was. She never told any one the secrets of her married life—good women must be sorely tried indeed before they do so—but she thought even now, with a wistful longing to share her fate, of the peasant girl sleeping in the Cumberland hills, who had been her husband's first wife. Had her heart broken, she sometimes wondered, that she had slipped so soon away from the

burden laid upon her? Or did hearts ever break? If so, they could not be those of mothers who had children given them to live for. Kate had come by this time, and then other children were born, boys, who died in their infancy. She had grief upon grief to bear, and yet sometimes she thought she might have had a heavier sorrow than even the loss of her sons, and that would have been to have seen them grow up into such men as their father.

Mr. Frederick—or rather Mr. Randal, as he had, by this time, a right to be called, being now the head of his house—had not thought it necessary to acquaint his second wife with the fact that he had had a daughter bequeathed to him by his first. But about ten years after their marriage the old people in Cumberland died, and the charge of the little girl, to whose existence all these years he had scarcely given a



thought, devolved upon him. He had her home, and told Mrs. Randal to give her the "run of the house," and see if she could turn her into something civilized; "one child more or less made little difference in a house, and she might be thankful the brat was not a boy."

For, by this time, Mrs. Randal was the mother of two sons, sturdier and healthier than those frail little blossoms that seemed to have been given only to be taken away. These children gave promise of life—strong, turbulent, little urchins; so that, good and unselfish as she was, it is possible her heart might not have warmed so readily to her husband's child had she been of the other sex. As it was, she took to Milly from the first. She was a staid, quiet little lassie, with a wonderful aptitude for her needle, and a strong Cumberland accent, which soon passed away under Mrs. Randal's teaching.

The boys took kindly to her, and Katey warmed to her at once. The French governess did her best for the new pupil, but decided that she would never do her the credit that Mademoiselle Randal did. Kate had always been Miss Randal, and the servants gave her that title still, and addressed the new-comer as Miss Millicent. And it seemed natural, and only in accordance with the fitness of things, that the bright, imperious, wilful little creature should take precedence over her quiet, yielding sister. Millicent herself would never have thought of questioning her sister's right to do so, and so the younger kept her place as the daughter of the house just as much as if Milly had never come to share her honours with her.

At the end of three years Mrs. Randal had another son, and never recovered from the effects of her confinement. At least that

was the version given of the seclusion in which she remained ever after, and the weakness that daily increased on her. Let what might have caused her illness, she kept her own counsel; God and she alone knew that she was dying sheerly because life was too hard to bear. She had gone about, all these years, doing her best to look like other women in her sphere; taking her part in the social duties of her position, smiling, dressing, going to dinners and giving them; visiting the poor, tending her children, and all the while feeling how gladly, if it were not for these children, she would sleep her last sleep, and have done with it all. She had borne so much that at last it seemed as if she were inured to suffering—her heart might waste itself away, but nothing could pierce it keenly more, and then came some fresh blow—some wrong so shameful in its brutish inso-

lence, that all the womanhood within her rose to resent it, and then the consciousness of her utter impotence came crushing on the poor bruised soul, and it lay down wearily to die—even the children could not give it strength to suffer more.

But she died as she had lived, in uncomplaining silence, and that very silence served to point one of her husband's coarsest jests. "Women are all hypocrites," he said, "and the better they are the cleverer at the game. My wife was the best woman I ever knew, and a greater sham never existed."

Millicent Randal was fourteen when her stepmother died, and, a month later, Kate and she were sent to a fashionable boarding-school, the three boys remaining under the charge of the nurse. Mr. Randal went on much as he had done in his wife's lifetime; there is no occasion to speak of his proceedings too minutely, but fortu-

nately it is in the nature of things for such matters to come to an end sooner or later, and Mr. Randal found himself compelled to give up his old associates and relinquish his former pursuits through sheer lack of means. His constitution was as much impaired as his purse, and his only chance, the physicians told him, of recruiting the former was by rest and quiet, and, above all things, country air.

Then he sent for his daughters to come home, and he, he told them, "a comfort to him": a part which did not suit Kate at all, who was much older in some things than Millicent, and understood her father pretty well. Milly was very ready to be "a comfort." She took charge of the children and the house with wonderful aptitude for a girl of seventeen, and Mr. Randal let her do it, as he could afford neither nurse nor housekeeper. But he let her feel that such domestic offices were all

that she was fit for, giving her neither praise nor thanks for their performance. Mr. Randal had committed many sins and some follies, but he was little troubled with remorse for the former, and there was only one of the latter that weighed greatly on him, and this was his marriage with the Cumberland peasant girl. He could never forgive his elder daughter her lowly origin on the mother's side. It was a matter of course that the innkeeper's grand-daughter should be a good housewife, but such merits were so plebeian that he could hardly forgive her for possessing them. He let Kate have her own way, or rather she took it, and the boys did pretty much as they pleased, but Millicent was made to feel that her father found it very hard to forgive either her or himself the fact of her existence. If she had only been handsome, bright, and imperious, like Kate, only a Randal, in fact, instead of being,

as she was so unmistakably, the descendant of those Cumberland yeomen, he might have tolerated her. As it was, he took some credit to himself for allowing Millicent to make her life, as she had done for the last four years, one long-continued sacrifice to himself and his better-born children.

It was almost a wonder that he did not also take credit to himself for having with laudable impartiality broken the hearts of both his wives—lady and peasant-born alike.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOATED GRANGE.

OLD age has a beauty of its own when it comes in due season,—even decay is often lovely if decay comes on gradually and in the natural order of things. But premature old age, the decay which is rotten rather than over-ripe, is another matter altogether. The Grange at Barleigh made you feel this. It *was* old, but it ought not, for its years, to have been so old as it was. It had been built in the time of Elizabeth, and many a mansion of that date still wears as bright and cheerful a look as within the first few years of its erection; but then an old place wants keeping up, and requires as many little cares and attentions to maintain its freshness and

vigour, as do either men or women when a little past their prime. The Grange was not handsome in its decadence. Its red bricks were overgrown with moss—the ivy that should have been a grace and ornament was, instead, an ugly excrescence, flinging its great gnarled arms over the whole face of the building, twisting round the chimneys and peering in at the windows, and encouraging bats and owls to nestle in its rank luxuriance. Some of the chimneys had broken down under the weight of the ivy, and there was no money to spare to renew them with; the moat which ran round the house was overgrown with duck-weed, and at times, in hot weather, its exhalations were not particularly wholesome. The garden had once been the great glory of The Grange. The Randals had always been proud of their gardens; they had delighted in quaintness and formality, in long straight

fish-ponds, and equally long and straight gravel paths; in yew-trees clipped into the forms of peacocks, in straight edges and square-cut beds; in sunny walls whereon year after year the peaches ripened into velvety bloom, and in well-kept arbours, wherein squire and dame might take their ease, or the lover urge his suit and the maiden listen, safe from the prying glance of the curious. In all the western country there had not been a better kept place than The Grange, and now that it had fallen into hands alike too poor and too neglectful to maintain it in anything like its former order, it bore the change even worse than a domain would have done that had never known what it was to be tended with such an elaboration of care.

If we may say so of a building, it was demoralized by the neglect it had suffered from. There was nothing of the poetry or the picturesqueness about it that an old

building should have. It was like a man to whom grey hairs and wrinkles had come before their time, and had none of the grace and dignity of honourable old age. You were depressed as you wandered over its paths, where the creeping moss showed greenly on the gravel; as you pushed your way through trailing branches that year after year missed the pruner's knife; as you looked upon the ponds now stagnant and unused, where no pet carp ever came, as the story ran that one had done for thirty years, for his daily dole of bread crumbs, and where the last trout had long since died a natural death, as if out of sheer vexation that no one seemed to think it worth while to secure him for the table. Within the precincts of The Grange, the recollections that so many ancient places bring of long past glories, and times when the house and its dwellers had held their own bravely in the

land, would have been too intolerable. For here, above all, the dreary, shameful present, with the ruin that had come before its time, and the desolation that the years alone could never have wrought, seemed to predominate.

The inside of the house was in keeping with the exterior. It had been comfortable enough when there were plenty of trim housemaids to keep its chambers in order, and when great fires burned on the hearths, and guests moved to and fro in its corridors, or gathered together in their favourite meeting-place—the large hall. There was plenty of good furniture in it still: carved oak settles and high-backed chairs that would have rejoiced the heart of any Wardour Street dealer, and spider-legged chairs and tables of a later date. Old china, too, in abundance, and pictures of one generation after another of Randals, from Dame Marjory, the wife of the founder of the house, in her farthingale.



and ruff, to the mother of its present possessor, in the short waist and crisp curls in which the beauties of George the Fourth's Court delighted. But over all, unless within the few rooms now occupied by the family, there hung the same air of neglect and dreariness. What could any housewife do—and Millicent Randal was, for her age, a pattern of housewifery—with only a couple of awkward girls to help her in-doors, and one lout of a boy who had to do what he could in a garden where, once, half-a-dozen men had found ample employment?

From the great hall, with its antlers, and family portraits, and carved staircase, which led to the principal chambers, you entered, on the right, the room that had once been the morning-parlour, and was now the usual sitting-room. It was smaller than either drawing-room or dining-room, and so was more easily kept trim and comfortable; and

it looked on a few flower-beds, which Millicent did what she could to render bright with such flowers as required little skill in their culture. But the room looked neither orderly nor comfortable now, for "the boys" had been amusing themselves there, and had left unmistakable signs of their presence. There were Walter's bricks; he had built a Tower of Babel on the floor, and his father, angry at the noise he and his brothers had made, as if in emulation of the confusion of tongues, had kicked it down. Reginald had left his books on the table in sheer disgust at the difficulties of his Latin theme, and Norman, who had been solacing his leisure with a dog's-eared copy of 'Roderick Random' purloined from the library, had flung it on the threadbare sofa. They were all three in the garden now, Mr. Randal having ordered them imperiously to leave his presence, and they had left their respective

litters for Millicent to clear away almost as a matter of course.

Like all boys, they were born tyrants, not particularly bad as boys go, but still delighting in a slave, and Millicent was their bondswoman. She tried to teach the two younger ones, but had been obliged to give up Reginald, who was the eldest and the most turbulent of all. She contrived, by still closer shaving of the household economies, to pay for him as a day scholar in a school a little distance from Barleigh, where older boys than those received by Amy Williams were taught; but there was no money to pay for the instruction of the others, so they learned what they chose for two or three hours of the day, and ran riot during the remainder, and their sins, shortcomings, and general misbehaviour were duly placed by Mr. Randal to the credit of his elder daughter. Now and then he gave the boys a kick, or

a cuff, or an oath, but these were the only signs by which he ever evinced any sense of paternal responsibility or affection.

Mr. Randal was walking up and down the threadbare carpet, and looking restlessly from one or other of the windows to see if his daughters were coming. They were late, and he was disposed to be angry; but he knew better than to show any signs of such anger towards *both*. If there was one human being of whom Mr. Randal stood in awe it was his younger daughter. He was not fond of her,—the man was too intensely selfish ever to have felt fondness for anything but himself,—but he was proud of her, and had, too, something of that cringing, slavish fear which a weak, cowardly nature feels instinctively for a strong and brave one. And whatever Kate Randal's faults—and she had her full share—neither weakness nor cowardice was amongst them.

Mr. Randal was a tall, large man, and had been a handsome one in his day—a little in the florid George the Fourth style—and he still wore his hair *à la* Brutus, though its dark brown was now well mixed with grey. The face had never been a good one, and yet women had been found to like it well enough,—two, at least, had liked it so well as to rue the day they had first seen it. The mouth was coarse, sensual, and imperious, showing the rough grain of the man's inner nature under all the lacquer of refinement. Mr. Randal prided himself upon his gentlemanly manners, just as his great exemplar, George, had done; but these manners were too fine for every-day display, and therefore he rarely wore them. If Millicent did not hasten her lingering steps she would meet with such a greeting as we may imagine the First Gentleman in Europe to have given his wife if

ever that unhappy lady kept him waiting for his dinner. Luckily for Millicent, as Mr. Randal looked for the twentieth time he saw her coming up the path, and another figure besides her sister's with her, and then his face brightened, and he said, with great earnestness, for he was really returning thanks for what to him was an almost unspeakable blessing, — "Thank Heaven! they've brought Corder home with them. We shall have whist to-night without a dummy!"



CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY CORDER.

IF Mr. Randal had been less occupied with the anticipation of his own game of whist, he might have seen that two, at least, of the young people now slowly coming towards the house had something besides that scientific game to occupy them. Even when they entered he saw nothing of this, though Millicent was looking almost pretty, with a flush on her cheeks and a light in her eyes which they had never known before, and which must have needed some more powerful influence than the evening air or the stroll over the sand tots to call up. Mr. Randal, however, only looked at her for an instant, and that was to find fault with her for being

late, then he turned to Harry Corder,—
“You’ll join us in a rubber? Millicent,
why isn’t the table set out? What are you
dreaming of, there?”

Harry Corder was ready to join in a rubber. Mr. Randal had put the question as a matter of course. What else had he come for? That nightly rubber was Mr. Randal’s one bright spot in the four-and-twenty hours, the precious reminder of the days that had been. He sat down to it every evening with the two girls, and when Harry Corder did not come they had dummy, Millicent always taking that invisible personality for a partner. Mr. Randal hated dummy, but whist with dummy was better than no whist at all. The game served to remind him of the golden days of his club life, when he had lost his hundreds, and tried in vain to win them back. Happy days, that led on to his ruin! The very

touch of the cards brought them all back again. He gambled as intensely and earnestly now for sixpence a rubber as ever he had done when he counted his losses and gains by the hundred. If it had not been for his skill at whist, it is more than doubtful whether Harry Corder would ever have been admitted to the Grange. He was altogether beneath the Randals in station, being simply the son of a man who farmed his own land, and, with the exception of a few hundreds which some benevolent godmother had kindly left him, with nothing to look to but his father, whose second son he was, his own strength, and his own exertions.

Time had been when Mr. Randal would almost as soon have thought of sitting down with his groom as with Harry Corder; but his skill in whist, — an accomplishment derived from this same benevolent godmother,—had caused Mr. Randal to over-

look not only the fact that Harry Corder was the son of a small yeoman, but that that yeoman had injured him very much by becoming the possessor of some of the lands which had formerly belonged to the Randals. They had come to the hammer along with a great many other good things, and Mr. Randal had found it impossible to forgive their present possessors; but the impertinence of Simon Corder, who had been a tenant farmer under himself and his uncle for twenty years, at last purchasing the very lands he had so long rented, was perhaps the keenest aggravation of all. However, he had brought himself to forgive Harry Corder his father and his father's sins, and to tolerate him in his house, nay, even to look eagerly for his coming, and accept, with tolerable complacency, the loan of the local papers from him, as well as several other small attentions which Harry, being

a good sportsman and fisherman, was able to offer him. He was not embarrassed by any sense of obligation ; indeed, this was a sense with which Mr. Randal had not been gifted ; and he thought he was doing the young man an honour for which he ought to feel an overpowering gratitude in allowing him to enter his house, to sit at his (card) table. Of possible consequences that might ensue when a young man was thrown into company with two girls, who scarcely ever saw another visitor, Mr. Randal never thought, and, if he had, he would never have had a rubber of whist the less.

Harry Corder was tolerably good-looking, tall, well grown, and with just a slight touch of provincialism, which Mr. Randal flattered himself the association with him was neutralizing. Whatever Harry thought of the honour of such association, he generally bore it with admirable self-possession, but

to night he was embarrassed and forgetful, played his cards badly. Was he thinking of other cards he had played that night, and the stake which he thought he had won, that he trumped his partner's (Mr. Randal) best card twice running, and brought down on himself such a reproof from that gentleman that it seemed as if he had forgotten that he was addressing his guest instead of his older daughter? At last, when some blunder made by Corder was crowned by a still greater one made by Millicent, Mr. Randal threw down his cards, "Either play the game as it should be played, or let it alone!"

Harry rose to go. "I am very sorry I have played so badly, sir. To tell you the truth, something quite different from the game has been occupying my thoughts. Will you let me come some time to-morrow morning and tell you what it is? What hour will be most convenient to you?"

Mr. Randal looked angry, and indeed disgusted. What did Harry Corder mean by saying he was in no humour to play? Why had he come at all if he couldn't attend to the game? And why on earth should he want to trouble him the next morning? Did he want advice? Mr. Randal hated giving anything, even that valuable commodity which most people are in general so ready to part with. It was assuming that other people's affairs were worth the trouble of his interesting himself in them, and it was therefore with the sulkiness of an ill-mannered child that he told Harry Corder he would see him the next morning at twelve; and then, without even waiting for him to leave the room, he called Millicent to order for the litter her brothers had made it in, and desired her to put away the cards, at which she had made such a fool of herself by attempting to play a game of which she

to-night he was embarrassed and forgetful, played his cards badly. Was he thinking of other cards he had played that night, and the stake which he thought he had won, that he trumped his partner's (Mr. Randal) best card twice running, and brought down on himself such a reproof from that gentleman that it seemed as if he had forgotten that he was addressing his guest instead of his elder daughter? At last, when some blunder made by Corder was crowned by a still greater one made by Millicent, Mr. Randal threw down his cards,—“Either play the game as it should be played, or let it alone!”

Harry rose to go. “I am very sorry I have played so badly, sir. To tell you the truth, something quite different from the game has been occupying my thoughts. Will you let me come some time to-morrow morning and tell you what it is? What hour will be most convenient to you?”

would never be able to master the slightest rudiments.

If Harry Corder, as he crossed the draw-bridge and walked through the untidy garden, let something very like an oath escape him, and felt an involuntary twitching in his right hand as if he would have liked to knock somebody down, I think the oath and the gesture might be forgiven him even by Sterne's recording angel, though the person who called them forth was no other than the gentleman he hoped before long to recognize as his father-in-law.

"D—n him!" said the young man; "I should be as great a cur as he is if I didn't move heaven and earth to get her away from him before long."

CHAPTER IX.

SISTERLY CONFIDENCE.

THE household were in bed; even Mr. Randal had forgotten his grievances in sleep, and was snoring as loudly as if he had had the three rubbers to which he had looked forward when he first saw Harry Corder coming towards the house that evening; and Millicent Randal sat in her own room, her long, fair hair unbound, her head leaning on her hand, blushing even now at the memory of the words she had heard that evening.

Something had come to her that night which she had never thought would come; nay, perhaps had never thought of it at all. Other girls might have lovers and husbands, but for her life seemed so full of other things—

of cares for brothers, father, and sister,—that there had seemed no room or place for love in it. She had always liked Harry Corder; he was kind, good-humoured, and handsome; but, till to-night, it had never occurred to her to think of him as a possible lover. Even now, did she love him? Millicent was in a flutter of surprise and gratitude, and took it for granted that she did. It was such a new page in her life. This experience, for which other girls, even the plainest, are generally in some measure prepared, had come to her so unexpectedly. Into her dull, prosaic life, with all its managements and contrivances, its stocking-mending and pudding-making, its little cares and petty thrifts, this bright, beautiful thing called love had entered! It was as if a beggar had found a new gold coin fresh and radiant from the mint where he had only thought to have a handful of coppers! And this coin was hers,



her very own, pressed on her acceptance with tender words and humble entreaties, just as if she had been as richly dowered with all bright and attractive qualities as was that born queen her sister Kate.

“If he had chosen her, I should not have wondered,” she said, half aloud; “but to think that he should single out me.”

“Ah, he has shown himself very sensible in doing it, Milly dear,” said Kate, who had come quietly into the room, and, drawing forward a carved arm-chair—the nearest approach to a lounge which Millicent’s room possessed—she seated herself in it.

“I thought you wouldn’t be asleep, so I’ve come for a chat. Everything’s quiet now, even the boys, so we can talk matters over in peace. Well, I think I can guess what Harry Corder is coming for to-morrow. Wasn’t I good to loiter behind? I suppose you and he have arranged everything?”

"Ye—es, I suppose so," said Millicent, looking down.

"I've been wondering when this would come," said Kate. "I've been expecting it for some time past."

Then Millicent looked up. "You've been expecting it? He didn't tell you?"

"Good gracious, no! as if one wanted words to understand this kind of thing! Only, Milly, you've had so many other matters to fill up your time. To-day there's been a great wash, and yesterday there was pickling, and the day before, preserving; and, altogether, poor little Cupid was afraid to put in an appearance before such a busy housewife. I've had nothing to do but to look on and speculate as to the issue of this one little bit of romance in our lives."

"Kate," said Millicent, with unusual solemnity, "while you've been talking, I've been thinking. Perhaps—perhaps in

telling Harry Corder he might come to-morrow I've been thinking too much of myself; only, you know, dear, that—that I shouldn't any way dream of leaving home just yet. I wish, oh! I do wish I knew whether, situated as we all are, it would be right for me to leave it at all!"

"I don't see that you're bound to keep your situation as housekeeper and upper-servant for life," said Kate; "let papa get another if he can. Here's just a little bit of happiness offered you, and I say take it. You like Harry Corder, and he's very fond of you; he'll make an excellent husband. I think these quiet, sensible, rather stout, good-looking young men generally do make good husbands. You'll manage him and suit him admirably. Of course, he isn't the style of man you ought to have had, but it's infinitely better to be a farmer's wife—said farmer looking up to you as a kind of terres-

trial angel—than to stay here and be drudge and slave in general, with not even thanks for your payment.”

“I don’t look at it in that light, Kate,” said Millicent, steadily.

“In what light, then? Mine’s the common-sense view of the affair, and a very disinterested one as far as I’m concerned. I’m sure I don’t know how things will go on here when you’re gone, but I say things must take their chance, and let me be uncomfortable along with the rest. Only you, Milly, must do the best you can for yourself, now the chance, such as it is, has come to you. Papa will rave, but that doesn’t matter; and he’ll say Harry Corder is no match for you, which of course, if things were as they should have been, he would not be. I shouldn’t at all wonder if you’ll have to run away—and perhaps that will be the shortest way of settling the affair.”



"I should never do that, Kate," said Millicent, with more than her usual grave sedateness; "and I don't think Harry Corder would forget himself so far as to ask me."

"I wouldn't say what a man won't forget when he's in love, Milly. A great deal more, I expect, than those who are not in love think possible. I wonder, I really do wonder," she added, looking curiously at her sister, "whether you really care for that very good-looking young man you've promised to marry."

Over the other's quiet, gentle face, a flush arose that was almost anger. "I *have* promised him, Kate; isn't that the best answer to your question?"

"Not at all. He's really very likeable, and situated as you and I are, what else is there for us but to accept the first fairly decent offer that comes? I shouldn't take

Harry Corder myself. I am so utterly useless, so completely unfit for such a life as he offers, that I should only make him miserable, and be myself even more uncomfortable than I now am. But if only some one were to come—I don't say a gentleman,—that would be too much for me to expect as things are,—but fairly rich, and with tolerable manners, and endurable enough to live with, I should take him. Where would be the need of love? Why should I wait for that which may never come? What else is there left to either you or me? What is there left to any woman placed as we are, but to make the best bargain for herself that circumstances permit of? Our lives are moulded for us. We are fixed in grooves in which we must run. If you and I were men instead of women, sons instead of daughters, would there be any need for you to be the household drudge you are,

or for me to sit here day after day and see my youth, and whatever beauty I may have, passing away? We should be looking for Fortune, instead of waiting for her to come to us—doing our best, it may be, to win a better fortune than our honoured papa has contrived to lose for us—perhaps even doing so much for the old name, that the tarnish he has thrown on it might be forgotten. When I think of what I am, and what I might have been if it had not been for being so girt and tried and trammelled by sex, I feel as if I could curse myself for being a woman; but *being* one, what better can I do than make the best bargain for myself that Fate permits?

“Don’t look horrified, Milly,” Kate went on, as she saw her sister’s cheeks paling while her vehement words were poured forth. “We’re not alike, and I’m ready to own that you’re infinitely better than I

am, and remember I haven't said a word against your acceptance of Harry Corder, though I can't see why 'you should be so *entêté* with him before marriage as you seem to think necessary."

"If I didn't think, Kate, that it was in me to love Harry Corder as much as a wife should love her husband, I would have said him no at once and for ever," said Millicent, in a low voice.

There came a slight curve on Kate's rich, red lip. Some retort rose to it, but was checked—an unwonted piece of forbearance on her part—and she looked curiously and intently at her sister. Was it true? Did she really *love* this good-tempered, good-looking young farmer, who, in Kate's eyes, was so ordinary a mortal? It might be possible, "Titania loved Bottom," thought Kate, but then Milly was not exactly the fairy queen, neither was Harry Corder the

transformed weaver. She felt a little contempt for her sister. That she should make the best of matters and take Harry Corder because she would be more comfortable as his wife than in her present position, Kate could understand. But to love him! As if *that* need be part of the bond! *Did* she do it? Milly was truth itself, but she might be self-deceived, "and if she is, why undeceive her?" thought Kate. "Perhaps, after all, that thing called love may be simply incomprehensible to her; she may take this easy, quiet liking of hers for it, and be so satisfied with the mistake that it would be a pity to undeceive her. I dare say some women go through their married lives without ever loving their husbands at all, and, what is more, never know it. I expect Milly will be one of these. Lucky girl! she'll do just what she is so horrified at the thought of my doing, and all the time

take credit to herself for acting in a manner completely opposite. And if ever her eyes are opened, I wonder whether she will lay the blame on Harry's shortcomings to her, instead of hers to him. Well, let it be which way it may, she'll make him a capital wife, and I think he'll have the good sense to know it."

Then Kate kissed her sister, and said,—
"Good night; I'll leave you to yourself, Milly. I dare say your own thoughts will be better company than I shall be. Don't think me desperately wicked for what I've said. I'm neither better nor worse than thousands of other girls, who haven't half my provocation to act as I talk of doing, only they're not honest enough to own it, and I am, that's all. Good night. Pleasant dreams of Harry Corder."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE COMBE FARM.

HARRY CORDER walked home that night at a slower pace than was his wont when he left The Grange. He had a great deal to think of, and a great deal to prepare for. Milly had her difficulties to face, but Harry was not quite sure that he should find his own way quite smooth sailing. What would his father and mother say to the new daughter-in-law he hoped to present to them? This idea had occurred to him before, but it had been put away in the background while he was yet uncertain of success with Milly herself; but now that he was at rest on that point, he was a little disquieted on the other. His people were

of a stamp more common at the beginning of the century than at the present day. His mother not only looked after her maids, but worked with them. She was busy in dairy and kitchen, just as his father was in field and farm. The Corders were not "gentlemen farmers" in this generation, whatever they might be in the next, for, in the last few years, Simon Corder had made a great rise in position by purchasing his farm. The Corders had been settled on it for the last two hundred years, paying their rent regularly as quarter-day came round, going to market and to church with equal punctuality, taking, now and then, a glass too much on the former occasions, and, equally of course, but with far more regularity, going to sleep on the latter. There had never been a Dissenter or a Radical in the family; they had held up their own amongst other people, but no one could say they had ever held it too

high, and they had been satisfied, one generation after another, with the state of life in which it had pleased Providence to place them; and there is no knowing for how many more successive generations of Corders this state of things might have sufficed if it had not been for the downcome of the Randals and the consequent elevation of the Corders.

Simon Corder, the present head of the household, had always been a hard-fisted, penurious man. Slowly but surely his savings accumulated year by year, and Simon's only trouble, as they did so, was how best to invest them. There was nothing like land, only how was land to be bought in the west country, where scarcely ever a farm that was worth the purchasing came into the market?—and Simon Corder was wedded to the spot where he was born as a limpet to the rock. To go elsewhere, and invest

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I have managed to find some time to write to you.

from the sky to the very centre of the earth all was his own. Outwardly, he showed little elation; let his satisfaction be what it might, not a muscle of his grim face relaxed, not a wrinkle of his forehead was puckered less severely. He went on living as plainly and working as hard as ever, to all appearance a man with as little pride and self-complacency in him as ever breathed; and yet, from the hour he woke to the time he laid his head upon his pillow, he was as pervaded by a sense of exultation, a consciousness of victory achieved, of a position gained, as ever was general after a hard-fought battle won, or sovereign when he found the crown pressing on his brow that year after year, by some untoward chance, seemed to be receding further and further from his grasp.

He had fought his fight and won his crown, this hard-toiling farmer. He had gained his kingdom for his very own at last; it was

his, to have and to hold, and to leave to his children for all the years, to come, until the very end of the world.

There was very little said, even in the family circle, of the change in their position. The Corders were always grave and reticent, not given to much confidential converse even with one another. But they could not help sharing some of the unspoken pride and elation of the head of the house, although, outwardly, they evinced their feelings as little as he did. John, the elder son, was another edition of his father, a hard-featured, plain, big-boned young man, who had formed a very sensible engagement with the daughter of a well-to-do tradesman in Taunton, and was now looking out for a farm which he might rent in his father's lifetime, in order that he might begin housekeeping. That would be the best way of occupying his time, his father and he had agreed, till he

should reign in his father's stead. The Combe Farm would hardly support two households, and he would be gaining further experience on another man's land while waiting to till his own.

Harry Corder had not been long at home. When he came into the money which his great-aunt had left him, he spent a couple of hundreds of it in articling himself to a great farmer a hundred miles away, who took pupils and professed to teach them the last improvements in agriculture, and in chemistry and steam as applied thereto; and old Mr. Corder, though he distrusted new ways, was not sorry to see his younger son applying himself to these. He might do something with them either as steward to some large estate, or by-and-by if he rented a farm. Meanwhile, he should come and gain old-world experience from his father, and Mr. Corder would see for himself what there was

in these new notions, and if he could pick a crumb or two of sense out of them he would not disdain to make use of them. But he would look well after Master Harry ; he should not be draining the goodness out of his land or hurting the breed of his cattle by all the learning he had thought fit to pay such a price for.

Perhaps, if it had not been for the acquisition of the Combe Farm by his father, Harry Corder would never have raised his eyes to Mr. Randal's daughter. Even in the fallen estate of the family there seemed a line, broad, deep, and impassable, between them and the tenant-farmers of the neighbourhood ; but the fact that the Combe was now Simon Corder's had seemed to a great extent to bridge over this gulf ; and when, evening after evening, Harry Corder had been thrown into the society of Millicent Randal, a liking that had a great deal of pity in it, and, perhaps,

just a little ambition (for, after all, Millicent, snubbed, hard-worked, and unjustly treated, was yet one of the Miss Randals of The Grange), had taken the shape of love; and Harry Corder, rightly or wrongly, had persuaded himself that the one thing now needful to him was a wife, and that Millicent Randal should be that wife. It had all seemed so pleasant and easy as he had walked with her by the sand that night, with her sister loitering behind. Sitting near her at the card-table, and stealing furtive glances at the face which had seemed lit up with a new beauty, as if to do honour to his love, and listening to Mr. Randal's sneers and insults to the good and patient girl, it had seemed a noble and manly thing to snatch her from her tyrant, and bear her to a home where she should have her rightful share of love and honour. But it was quite another matter now. He had his own people

to think of, and what they would say to a daughter-in-law so much above them. It had seemed, too, a great thing to marry a lady; when he had looked lately at his brother's intended he had prided himself a little that his future wife would be of so very different a stamp. But would his father and mother take the same pride in the matter that he did? Would not their yeoman prejudices be almost as much shocked by his raising his eyes so far above him as they might have been if, on the other hand, he had looked below his own sphere and proposed to a cotter's daughter? It was very likely—more than likely: with every step that brought him nearer to his home the probability seemed to increase, till, at last, when he opened the little wicket-gate of the small, old-fashioned garden before the house, instead of feeling like an exultant lover coming to speak of the prize he had gained, his sensa-

tions were much more those of a schoolboy who had the onus laid upon him of recounting his own ill-behaviour.

Age had improved the Combe farmhouse more than it had done The Grange. It was a long, low building, of one story high, that had never been built with much regard to beauty. But time had mellowed its tints, and flung over the thick, homely walls the grace and beauty of creeping tendril and green foliage. The rooms were low and small, and, until within the last few years, the garden had been a farmyard, and the approach to the house had been flanked by a manure heap on one side and a pond for ducks on the other; so that the prim box-edged beds, with their few old-world flowers, and the straight gravel paths, were a manifest improvement on the former state of things, prim and unlovely as they were in themselves.

They struck Harry Corder to-night as being very little better than the farmyard which they had supplanted. He thought of the garden of The Grange, and, neglected as it was, its very size made the poor plot before him look small and mean. What would Millicent Randal think the first time she trod those narrow walks, and entered that low doorway to visit his mother?—his mother who was to be hers. The incongruity of the thing struck on the young man with a sense of painfulness. How would Mrs. Corder of the Combe Farm comport herself to Miss Randal of The Grange? And how would Millicent like his father and brother, and, above all, that loud-voiced, showy young woman who was to be his brother's wife?

“She needn't see very much of them,” was his thought, and then he blamed himself for it. What right had he to feel thus

towards his own kinsfolk, plain and homely as they might be? After all, his father was a better man than hers; and how were her brothers likely to grow up, that she should look askance on his? And as to her mother, if all tales were true, she was but the daughter of a Cumberland innkeeper. Millicent Randal would have little reason to look shyly on his people. But all this did not re-assure him,—at every step the difficulties of the case seemed to grow upon him; and yet it was less Millicent's refinement he was afraid of than the hard yeoman pride of his own kinsfolk.

He had no need to knock at the house door, but, raising the latch, he went in. From the flagged passage on the one side there opened the stone-paved kitchen, where the two maids sat at their supper. He could hear their chatter as he turned towards the parlour, which was on the other side of the

passage. It was a small, homely room. A few years ago Simon Corder had thought it well to comply sufficiently with the times to put a fireplace in it, instead of the open hearth by which one generation after another had been content to warm themselves. He sat on one side of it now, looking over the *Westshire Chronicle*, and his wife, who was always busy at her stocking-mending when her more stirring avocations were at an end, was on the other. The old people had supped, but Harry's mother had kept the bread and cheese waiting for him—it was not often that he was invited to take a meal at The Grange: she pointed to it now,—“There's supper, lad,”—and went on placidly with her work.

She was a small woman, with a thin, anxious face, that had a kindly, lovable look, too. Harry Corder was very fond of his mother, the more so, perhaps, because

his father took more than his rightful share of marital supremacy, and Harry did not like to see any one put upon; and perhaps this homely chivalry of his had a good deal to do with his having fallen in love with Millicent Randal. Harry wanted no supper to-night, so he drew up one of the cushioned windsor chairs towards the fireplace and sat down, thinking how he should best bring out what he had to say.

Presently his father made an opening for him. "John won't be home till late; he's out courtin'. Missus, I expect you'll have to sit up for him. Well, it won't be for long, an' it's hard if he can't have a little grace just now," he added, with a spasmodic chuckle, which was the nearest approach Mr. Corder ever made to a laugh.

"I don't grudge him the grace, you know, father," said Mrs. Corder, meekly. "It would be a pity indeed if he shouldn't have

a fair time to do his courtin' in. I'd sit up for him six nights a week sooner than that should be. He knows that, and Harry here will know it too when his turn comes. The young folks must have their day."

"And send the girls to bed in good time. No need for them to be burnin' candle in waste," said Mr. Corder; "and tell Suke to be sure she's down early. That wench is a real lazy one. You'll have to send her packin' if she don't mend her ways afore long."

"I don't think she's just that strong as she should be," said Mrs. Corder.

"Shouldn't go out to service, then. She's strong enough with her knife and fork, if she's strong with nothing else. I never knew one o' they weakly sort that wer'n't. Now, Harry, what's come to you, that you're quarrellin' with your supper?"

"I'm not hungry, father; and there's

something I should like to tell you," said Harry, with a little shamefacedness.

Mr. Corder, who had held his pipe in his hand while lecturing his wife on the management of her maids, now laid it down on the table, and something like a glimmering of the truth broke on him.

"What is it, lad? What have you been up to at the House there?"

And his mother turned to Harry with a frightened, wistful look in her face, which made what he had to say all the harder. All at once both father and mother seemed to know why he had been visiting so much at The Grange, and what the result had been. They were prepared for what he had to say to them, but not prepared to receive it as he would wish them to do. That was clear. Well, if a storm was to come, the sooner it was braved the better.

"I suppose I thought I'd follow John's

example, and go courting too," he said, with a faint attempt at gaiety; "and to-night I've asked Miss Randal—Miss Millicent, that is—to be my wife. There's another daughter for you, mother."

Mrs. Corder opened her bright grey eyes and her thin little lips, but said nothing, only she looked thoroughly frightened, as if the fact of her son's audacity, now that he had put it in words, was almost overwhelming. Mr. Corder swore; a thing which he rarely did, and only in moments of great excitement. Then he said,—

"Wasn't there another house you could go to for a wife in all the country side but there? What shall I do with a fine madam, who will be ashamed to call me father-in-law if she sees me with a muck-fork in my hand, or maybe at the tail of my plough? I've worked for every penny I have. If it hadn't been for the work I'd never have had the

writings of the land upstairs in my strong box. I'll stand by the work as the work has stood by me; an' I don't want a Miss Randal, who never did a hand's turn in her life, to come floutin' an' sneerin' at me an' your mother. We're plain folk, we are; an' we like to have to do with such. And how will you keep a fine lady like that? How long do you think your bit of money will last when she comes to have the spending o't?"

"If you knew Millicent Randal better you wouldn't talk like that, father. She has to look to every penny closer than I hope she will need to do when she is my wife; and as to work, I think there's not a girl in the county gets through more than she does in a day," said Harry, earnestly.

"Aye, aye, you just see what you're meant to see in her. Like as not she wants a husband, for the old fellow is one of the contrary sorts, and the girl's, maybe, glad to

get away from home, and so will put up with one of your sort as she can't get one of her own, an' so she wants you to think her good for something better than the most o' they fine, stuck-up madams. But is she like to be a good wife if she only just takes you to get away from her home? Will your ways be her ways? Can you fancy her sitting here with your mother and me, or driving over in a tax-cart to see her sister that is to be? The Randals may be poor, but they're proud, and a spendthrift, wasteful lot, or they'd never have come down as they have done. I'd sooner see you marry a decent serving-lass with nothing but her smock than a girl that will look down upon your own folk all the more that she's got such a bad lot of her own."

Mrs. Corder tried to put in her feeble word. She sided with her husband, and yet she was so sorry for her son, and against her

better judgment she wanted to plead for the latter; but her husband silenced her.

“ Harry an’ I’ll just settle this atween our two selves, mother. It’s a thing that’ll be none the better for your meddlin’ with.”

But it was not so easily settled; and the poor mother, after she had sent the maids to bed, lest in the kitchen, on the other side of the house, they should hear more than was advisable, had to sit and hear “ father ” storm and scold, and Harry make what defence he could. Mr. Corder was an obstinate man, and he was hurt in his tenderest point. He liked to be the head of his household, and to have every member of it look up to him as its domestic autocrat; and a Miss Randal would not do this. She would despise him and his belongings. What would the few fields, that he had worked so hard to win, be in the eyes of a girl whose forefathers had owned them and ten times as

The Grange coming inside these doors to flout your mother an' me."

Then he took up his chamber candlestick and walked upstairs, and Harry rose sullenly and went to his own room.

It was a small, low chamber, scantily furnished. Through all the Combe farmhouse the same air of economy verging on penuriousness prevailed. As Harry walked up the uncarpeted stairs, and, entering his room, looked on the patchwork quilt made by his mother on winter nights, the one strip of carpet by the bed-side, and the chipped white delf-ware of the washstand, the utter absence of all luxury and almost comfort struck him. The furniture of The Grange might be old and worn, but the plenishing had once been ample, and, in the few rooms its inmates now occupied, Millicent managed to preserve an air of comfort and, as far as "the boys" would permit her, of elegance.

Granted that the carpets were threadbare, and the curtains worn and dim, the gilded frames of the old portraits tarnished, and she herself cheaply dressed and obliged to ply her needle even in his presence with unremitting industry unless compelled to sit down to the card-table,—still, if she mended stockings as assiduously as his own mother, she sat down to an Indian work-table, which a princess might have delighted in, to do so, and the few common flowers the neglected garden of The Grange still furnished were arranged with as much skill and taste as if they had been reared in a nobleman's hot-house, and the old vases that held them were of a wholly different material and shape from the gay-coloured jug that sometimes held a bunch of primroses or wallflowers on his mother's round table, while over Millicent herself there hung that indefinable air of refinement which made her seem of quite

another race to his brother's intended. She was a lady to the core, let her father sneer at her as he might; and was *his* father in the right in saying that a lady would be the most unfit wife for him that he could have found?

How would she bear his people and their ways? Would she ever learn to tolerate them? And was it indeed true, as his father had hinted, that she was only taking him to escape from the tyranny of her own home? He could not think that of her! He was ashamed of himself for the thought as the vision of that good, gentle face, and that much enduring, patient life rose before him. She would be a true wife to him, let his father say what he might, and he would not give her up—no, let his father and her own set their faces against the marriage as much as they pleased.

There came a soft knock at his door, and in answer to his "Come in," his mother

entered. She was always a tearful little woman, with whom life never went very smoothly. She shut the door and gave a frightened look around her, as if she feared some one might be in the room besides her son and herself, and then, sitting down on the very edge of the bedstead, looked up at her son, saying tearfully,—

“I never did think of your bringing a fine lady home to us, Harry.”

“She won’t be fine, mother. She works every bit as hard as you do. There never was a girl living with less nonsense about her. When you come to know her you will soon see what a daughter she will make you.”

But even as he spoke his heart misgave him. How would Millicent Randal, with all her simplicity, learn to be a daughter to the plain little woman before him, with her old-world cap tied so decorously under her chin, and her white linen apron, whose folds she

had a habit of smoothing on the rare occasions when her busy fingers could find nothing else to do? What would they have in common, this mother and daughter, as he hoped to make them? How could he expect Millicent to sit down and listen with dutiful patience to the record of the butter and the cheese, the chickens that had been hatched, and the lambs that had died, which formed the sum total of Mrs. Corder's conversation?

Mrs. Corder shook her head, and twisted her apron nervously between her fingers.

"She may work hard, but it's not in my way, and if she isn't fine, she's altogether different to a plain body like me. She'll look down on me, and I couldn't bear that in my own place. I never go out of it. I'm never for pushing amongst my betters. I think like's best with like, and the less they of one sort see of another the better; so it'll come very hard on me to see a Miss Randal carryin'

off my son. — she'll sue in, and I shall sue in, and maybe, Harry, you'll sue in most of all."

"There will be no suing for any of us, mother," he said, with forced cheerfulness. "I shall have the best wife in the whole country, and I don't think Miss Randal will have the worst husband, and you'll have a daughter more after your own heart than any John is like to bring home, fine lady as you think her; and, after all, things are not as they were with the Randals any more than with us. They have gone down and we have gone up, *so it's about time we began to meet half way.*"

Mrs. Corder again shook her head dubiously.

"Things must go very different to what they have before that comes to pass. Miss Randal can't forget what has been on her side any more than on ours, and, if she could, her folks wouldn't — not for the next hundred years or so. But I'm hinderin' you of your rest, and your father will be fidgettin' for

me (for John's come home), an' worryin' about the candle burnin'; so good night, Harry; and if you will have your way you must take it, but I doubt more trouble lies before you than you're thinkin' for."

Then she kissed him, and he her, just as he might have done when a child. He was very fond of his mother, though she did wear that queer old-world cap and white linen apron, and she went her way whimpering, just as she had come in. He was certain he heard a peculiar sniff as she left the room that always accompanied his mother's tearful moods, and he lay down, feeling not at all as a young man should feel who has just won the consent of his love to become his wife, but with a dull, heavy cloud weighing him down, which he might have taken, if so disposed, as an omen that his mother's words were likely to come true, and that more trouble lay before him than he thought for.

CHAPTER XL

MRS. TOWERS'S LETTER.

NONE of the meals were particularly pleasant gatherings at The Grange, but perhaps breakfast was the dreariest of all. Mr. Randal was, if possible, rather more irritable at that time than at any other. The boys came lounging down one after the other, and then they were in a hurry to devour their food and be off, Reginald to school, the others to race in the neglected grounds or the fields beyond. Millicent did her best to make the table look fair and seemly with such poor materials as she had, and the greater part of the year there were flowers, and always the richly-chased, old-fashioned silver, and fine delicate table linen, which now formed such

a contrast to the cheap earthenware with which she had been compelled to replace the Sèvres and Worcester, which one careless servant after another had played such havoc with. Mr. Randal always had his own little dish carefully prepared for him, and the coffee was good and the bread well made; and Millicent's own sweet presence would, to any other man than her father, have thrown a charm around a much homelier meal than that to which he sat down every morning.

She had one exquisite grace, that of an ultra-refined physical purity. She always looked fresh and neat—dirt never clung to Millicent Randal; her cheap muslins and prints kept clean three times as long on her as they would have done on most others. None of the household duties that she had to perform seemed to leave a soil on her; her hair was always smooth and bright, her face and bearing undisturbed, let her have been engaged

in whatever domestic mystery she might. Any one but Mr. Randal would have recognized this as a mark of her true ladyhood, but in his eyes it only appeared another confirmation of her fitness for the office of household drudge-in-chief, and for nothing more.

The post came in at breakfast - time when it came at all to The Grange; but of late years day after day would pass by, and bring no missive to any of its inmates. And when letters did come they were rarely pleasant ones—remonstrances from creditors who thought that Mr. Randal might at last have a little money to pay them, or circulars from tradespeople who thought that he might still have a little left to spend; and therefore when the post-bag came in on the morning after Harry Corder's last visit to The Grange, it caused anything but the usual pleasant excitement

with which its advent is usually greeted in a country house.

So seldom indeed as letters came, it seemed almost a farce keeping a post-bag at all. It would have saved a great deal of time to the one boy-of-all-work if the postman had been allowed to take The Grange in his ordinary rounds ; and, for such letters as Mr. Randal received, it certainly seemed a matter of very little moment whether he had them an hour sooner or later. But to have the post-bag fetched, as if its prompt arrival was a matter of the utmost importance, was a thing Mr. Randal considered essential to his own dignity ; so Tom was despatched every morning from his boot and knife cleaning to the village, that any letter which might possibly be lying there for The Grange might reach the master a little sooner than it would otherwise have done.

Mr. Randal's temper was rather worse

than usual this morning. His omelette was slightly burned, and Millicent in pouring out his coffee had spilled a little on the fresh white tablecloth. She was not quite herself this morning. Could the best young housekeeper be expected to be so keenly alive as usual to all her domestic cares and responsibilities the day after hearing with willing ears a declaration of love? After all, she could not be quite all housekeeper, and instead of looking after the omelette, as she should have done, and pouring out the coffee with her usual steady hand, Millicent had been picturing a bright, sunny little home, with some one not quite so difficult to please as her father.

It was a relief to her, at least, when the post-bag came in, and one letter was taken from it.

"A woman's and," said Mr. Randal, turning it over, "and rather more legible

than is generally the case. Kate, I wonder if our good cousin Lady Glyssop has thought of us at last?"

Kate had followed the post-bag into the room. She was always the last to come down, and she looked, as she had a habit of looking the first thing in the morning, as if the trouble of getting out of bed was rather more than anything the day could bring forth was likely to make up for. She took her place languidly at the breakfast-table, and answered her father.

"I don't see why Lady Glyssop should, after forgetting us all these years. Don't you think, papa, the best way to find out whom the letter is from will be to open it and look at the signature?"

Mr. Randal took his daughter's advice, and said with a frown, "Lucy Towers. Now what business on earth has Lucy Towers to write to me? She was always one of

the most underbred women I ever knew. Your mother was foolish enough to take a little notice of her, which I told her she would regret doing, and now I suppose Mrs. Towers is presuming upon it."

He read a few lines of the letter—carelessly at first, then with a quickening interest. "Confound her impudence! Kate, she wants one of you girls to go and live with her in London."

Kate sprang to her feet. All her torpor and languor had left her in a moment. "Papa! you don't mean it. Milly! to think of it! London! to live in London!"

"With Mrs. James Towers?" said her father superciliously. "Do you know that he went into trade?"

"Never mind, if he made plenty of money by it. Well, papa, mayn't we hear what the good lady says who is so ready to adopt one or other of us?"

"You may read the letter for yourself," said Mr. Randal, handing it to her, and, through all, ignoring Millicent's presence.

"Listen, Milly," said Kate, and read aloud:—

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—It is so many years since we last met, that I feel half-ashamed of writing now, but I think the cessation of correspondence did not arise from any fault on our side, and, indeed, James and I have always felt an interest in you all, and especially in your two girls. Times have altered with us since we last saw you. You will see by the address that we have moved, and, with a larger house, some alteration in our style of living has necessarily followed. This is all very pleasant, especially as James's income fully justifies our increased expenditure; but a great house is a great care,

and I often wish I had a daughter to lighten my household duties for me. Children, however, have, as you know, been denied us, and of late it has occurred to James and me that we might be of some assistance to you, and have a source of great comfort to ourselves, if we received one of your daughters into our own home, where, I need hardly say, she would meet from both of us with every kindness and care.

“Should this proposal meet your wishes, James and I will be glad to have an early day fixed for the reception of our young cousin, who, I hope, will not be afraid of travelling alone, and James will meet her at the railway station. He wishes me to say that he should have been glad to have paid you a visit and escorted her to town himself, but just now he is unable to spare a single day from business.

“James unites with me in love to

the girls, and kind regards to yourself, and believe me,

“Your affectionate Cousin,

“LUCY TOWERS.”

“Well, really, Kate, I hardly see what necessity there was for reading this aloud,” said her father. “And now the question is, whether it is worth while or not to answer this precious epistle.”

“Decidedly it is,” replied Kate. “Neither Milly nor I, whichever of us elects to go, can instal ourselves in Russell Square without due notice being given.”

Mr. Randal put down his coffee-cup and looked at his daughter. “You don’t mean—you *don’t* mean to tell me, Kate, that you really contemplate the acceptance of this preposterous offer? I could understand your sister’s doing so, but *you*—”

“I don’t see that it’s at all preposterous,

papa; I think it's very kindly meant; and I should say Mrs. Towers is a very good-natured person."

"She's the veriest screw!" cried Mr. Randal, irritably. He had some unpleasant recollections of Mrs. Towers, notwithstanding his assumed forgetfulness of her, she having, on two or three occasions, prevented her husband obliging his cousin with loans which would certainly never have been repaid.

"Well, economy's a very desirable virtue, and it would be a good thing, papa, if more people practised it."

Mr. Randal appeared not to hear this remark. He was accustomed to such sharp-shooting from his younger daughter, and generally found it better to evade the arrows than endeavour to return them. He continued, as if she had not spoken,—“And look at the locality — Russell Square! A suitable place, certainly, for a Miss Randal!”

“Well, of the two, I should certainly prefer Grosvenor Square, papa, but it’s neither Milly’s fault nor mine, remember, that we haven’t come out there or somewhere else. But if I can’t see the world as other Miss Randals have seen it, why, I’d rather look at it from a lower point of view. But I’ve no right to speak for myself alone. Milly, you’re the elder; I don’t know why papa has such a habit of ignoring the fact. It’s for you to have first choice. Now, what do you say? It’s not a brilliant alternative, but it’s better than none at all. Russell Square or The Grange?”

“I—I—should leave it with papa to decide,” said Millicent, hoping the while that papa would let her remain where she was. Life at The Grange, with all its cares, had taken a very different aspect since last night, and London was so far from Harry Corder!

“I think Millicent is quite aware that she

a low salary suggested in London letters :
 even the most of Liberal donors : and Mr.
 Towner's suggestion. The man was a
 thorough man in the sense that he never missed
 an opportunity of getting in his most beautiful
 face. Mr. Towner thought that with
 very little more and the full complement of
 clothing, and as soon as the first night at
 Mrs. Towner's good-looking son had sub-
 stantially reported to him that, after all, it
 was worth some consideration. He should
 certainly retrench his expenses if he honoured
 her husband and herself sufficiently to allow
 them to maintain one of his daughters, but
 that one must not be the elder. If she was
 born for a drudge, at least she fulfilled her
 mission, while he almost shuddered as he
 pictured his domestic comfort in the hands
 of Kate. And he was proud of Kate, too, and,
 as much as it was in his nature to love, he
 loved her. She might marry well under the

auspices of Mrs. Towers—not as the former daughters of his house had married, but still well enough, considering its present altered circumstances. But he did not choose to say this plainly; if he let Kate leave him, it must be as a concession to her wishes and a favour to Mrs. Towers, not at all as a thing which he himself wished, or by which he could indirectly benefit; therefore, after a short pause, he added,—“I must think this over, Kate. I dare say Mrs. Towers means well, and it might not be amiss for you to see a little of London, even from Russell Square. Millicent, I am going to my study. If you could by any possibility conceive that one can neither read nor think with any degree of comfort while those boys are making such an uproar, I should be glad. I have heard there are some organizations of a lower type than usual who are impervious to noise. I really can believe it when I look at you.”

“Horrid little nuisances!” burst forth Kate. “Milly, you’re too gentle by half with them. Papa, if you *won’t* send them to school, why don’t you buy a cane for them and use it? We might then have some chance of a quiet life.”

Then Millicent went out to “those boys,” and persuaded Reginald to leave “hopscotch” and go to school, and the others to come in and sit down to their lessons with her, trying her best to forget for a little time that there were any greater anxieties in human life than those connected with idioms and tenses or compound addition, though, every other minute, her mind would wander away to Harry Corder, and she would detect herself speculating as to his punctual arrival, and the reception Mr. Randal would be likely to give him.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. RANDAL INDIGNANT.

KATE RANDAL went up to her own room, and, closing the door, sat down to re-peruse Mrs. Towers's letter, of which she still kept possession. Then she laid it down, and looked thoughtfully at herself in the glass. She was not, as I have said, regularly beautiful, but she had "that charm than beauty dearer," the one of varying expression and changeful light and shade. True, the expression was not always a pleasant one; but, when Kate smiled, the whole face was lit up; and when she was in one of her more placid moods,—a very rare thing, by-the-bye,—the eyes would wear a sweet, calm thoughtfulness, that had once made Master Reginald observe, "Who could

look at Kate now and think what a vixen she is!"—a remark which had quite put an end to the serenity he had admired, and brought on him as sound a box on the ear from his indignant sister as a lady's hand could very well administer.

But it was a fine face if not a strictly beautiful one. The forehead was broad, and as high, and no more, as it should be to give a fair promise of intellect. The rich dark-brown hair, just stopping short of black, was braided at the sides, and wreathed in a thick cluster of plaits behind. Fashions might come and go, but Kate still arranged her hair in the self-same manner, which she knew suited her best. The eyes beneath the dark, well-arched eyebrows were of that deep, changeful grey whose colour is so uncertain; they might have been the sweetest eyes were ever seen, had they had a lover to shine upon; but, in default of this,

they were angry, flashing, stormy eyes, or else sullen and gloomy ones. The face was almost a perfect oval, terminating in a full, dimpled chin. The mouth, much too large for beauty, was full of character—an imperious, wilful mouth,—the mouth of a woman who would say “No” very decidedly, but “Yes,” when she did say it, with all her heart. The complexion was rich, bright, and glowing, tanned a little by the sun—for Kate, if she prized her beauty, took small pains to guard it; but the charm of the whole face, and of the still undeveloped, girlish figure, was the promise they implied. You felt that, given the needful culture and favourable circumstances, this girl would ripen into a glorious woman, and that her loveliness was as yet only in its morning. It was no mere pink-and-white brilliancy, no evanescent beauty *de diable*. You were not afraid, when you looked upon Kate Randal, that a few

summers would see her bloom fading and her cheeks hollow. The Randal women possessed the charm of a slowly developing youth and a glorious middle age. Kate Randal, if she resembled them at forty as much as she did at nineteen, would be in a splendid Indian summer; possibly, in many eyes, a more attractive specimen of womanhood than she was now.

Kate smiled as she looked at herself in the glass. "I ought to do, even in London; and if Mrs. Towers only gives me the chance, I shall marry—*must* marry well. At any rate, once I leave The Grange I shall never return to it."

Then she thought over London, and all that it was likely to give her, and the probable chances of her making a speedy sale of the handsome face she saw reflected in the glass. It was the only opening for her, and she deliberately prepared to avail

herself of it. It was the only thing that, as a woman gently born, she could do. She felt not a tinge of shame or self-reproach in this bargain she contemplated, and the possibility of loving the man who was to endow her with his wealth never occurred to her. He was to be rich and passable,—that was all for which she asked, all for which she saw any necessity. She was not heartless, only she had not found her heart, and if it had not been for such little love as she gave her sister, would not have believed that she had one. And she had not much religious feeling—very little faith in God—none, perhaps, in any human being but that sister.

She was roused from her reverie by the abrupt entrance of her brother Walter into the room, and, before she could scold him for this breach of the proprieties, he burst forth with—

Kate opened the door, walked in, and quietly took her place by her sister's side. Her brother Walter had certainly been correct, if not very elegant, in saying that his father was in one of his "rages," and I would rather leave it to the imagination of my readers to picture what the "rage" of a man habitually forgetful of all moral restraints, and ready to trample all conventionalities under foot, when, as in this instance, he had to deal with one with whom he had no occasion to observe them, could be, than attempt to describe it. Milly sat cowering and trembling beneath the storm which her lover had brought upon her. To him at least Mr. Randal had only been cuttingly sarcastic in the refusal he had given. It was only to a woman, and a woman so utterly in his power as his own daughter, that he could launch forth into the storm of invective and abuse which

now resounded through the room. It was, perhaps, the first time that he had come to such lengths with Millicent. But neither her mother nor Kate's had been a stranger to such scenes.

When he paused for sheer want of breath, Kate said,—“I think, Millicent, you had better come away with me, and give papa time to recollect himself.”

“I think I want it,” was the reply, given in a lower tone, but one full of all the bitterness that rankled in the speaker's heart, for Mr. Randal really believed himself to be an ill-used and insulted man. “I think I want it,” he repeated, “if I am to remember that I am Frederick Randal, when a clod, whom I have been weak enough to admit to my table, has dared to ask me for my daughter's hand, and that daughter tells me it is by her permission he has done so. We were fallen enough,

Heaven knows," added Mr. Randal, who had a habit of now and then appealing to Heaven, as if perfectly sure that it must be on his side, "but I did not think we had arrived at such a pass as to make the degradation of receiving such an offer possible."

"Well, papa," said his younger daughter, with unflinching voice, "you best know how it is that we have come to this pass—how it happens that, though Milly is nearly twenty-one, and I above nineteen, the first offer we have either of us had comes from a farmer's son. I must say I don't think we're responsible for this state of things; but, seeing that matters are so, isn't it wisest to make the best of them, and consider whether this offer isn't as well worth accepting as the one Mrs. Towers made us this morning?"

Mr. Randal swore, and ordered the two girls to leave the room. "We are quite

ready to do so, papa," said Kate; "as I said before, you would be best by yourself."

She drew her sister away and led her into the room which she had left but a few minutes before. Then Millicent sank down on the first chair she came to, crying, trembling, shivering as if with cold, in her terror. Kate gave her a look, half of pity, half of wonder. That any one should be *afraid* of a thing so simply detestable as their father! She was furiously angry with him,—but *fear!* he was too poor a creature for *that!*

"Did any one ever know anything so disgusting, horrible, and indecent? It's shameful! shameful! Millicent, your mother and mine were two murdered women, and so might we be too—only daughters are harder to kill than wives."

"Kate! Kate! you shouldn't talk like that. It is wicked, terrible, when you are speaking of your father."

“Let the wickedness rest on him that caused it! But, oh, you poor, foolish, good creature, it’s no use my frightening you like this. Can’t I help you in any way? Will you go to Russell Square instead of me?”

Millicent shook her head. “It’s very good of you, Kate, but you get on so badly with the boys. And how would the house go on?”

“Not too well, I am afraid,” said Kate, ruefully. “Housekeeping isn’t my *forte*. Well, then, suppose you run away with Harry Corder, and let me help you before I go to London. Then papa and the boys may get on as they can. After all, it will be the best thing possible for the latter. Papa is sure to send them to boarding-school when there’s nobody here to take them off his hands, and they’re being ruined at home.”

“No, I would never run away,” said Millicent, with a little gentle pride. “I would never be married like that. And, in any case,

"I expected ours to be a long engagement. I suppose there is nothing for it but time and patience," she mused, with a sigh. "Some day you may change, and I must do the best I can meanwhile."

"You may have to wait till you're grey-haired."

"I'll wait if Harry will," said Millicent, with a wan smile, "or set him free at once—just which he pleases."

"He won't take his freedom: and yet I doubt whether he is worth the waiting for," said Kate, half to herself. "But what else can you do?" she cried, with a sudden gush of pity. "You poor, patient, much-enduring creature! Life seems to be so hard for you, Milly. Shall I stay here and help you bear it? Only tell me that you'd rather have me with you, and I'll give up Russell Square and all my chances!"

Kate flung herself down before her sister,

and, throwing her arms around her, looked up in the poor tear-stained face. Milly bent down, and stroked the long hair which had partly come undone, much as a mother might a child's.

"You are very good, very good to ask if you shall stay, and I know your heart is so set upon going; but I think it is best for you to be away. You're so miserable here—only, my darling, don't think any more of such mad foolishness as you were talking of last night. It can only lead to worse misery than you have ever yet known. Promise me that, won't you, Kate?"

"I'll promise nothing! I'll go quite free or not at all! Only, Milly dear, if ever I have a home worth the name, I'll move heaven and earth to get you to share it with me."

"But if I come," said Millicent, with a faint smile lighting up her face, "I must

bring papa and the boys with me. Who would ~~see~~ to their buttons and socks else?"

"We'll leave papa to take care of his own; and as to the boys, I'll pay for their schooling out of my pin-money. Anything so that I have you with me; and we'll see good days together yet!"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN RUSSELL SQUARE.

AT the Paddington Terminus, just one week after Mr. Randal had been reminded of Mrs. Towers's existence, an elderly gentleman was waiting on the platform for the arrival of the up-train. He had a grave, quiet, and yet genial face, though he looked testily at the railway clock, comparing it with his own watch, and then glanced round as if in search of some official to whom he might complain of the train's being twenty minutes past the time at which it was due.

A business man, possibly, to whom time was of importance, and who was too punctual himself to make any allowance for the shortcomings of others, but a kindly man also, if

the night, and by the brightening up of the day, and the smile of welcome that lit up his face, on the arrival of the train at last, a young girl looked out anxiously from the window of a second-class carriage, and, seeing him, said timidly.—“Mr. Towers?”

“Miss Randal? Yes, my dear, to think that you should know me!” He held out his arm for her to alight with a gentle, kindly courtesy that Kate had not expected she should meet with in the cousin who had allied himself with trade. Then he looked after her luggage, and, almost before Kate knew it, she found herself installed in a very roomy and comfortable brougham, the door closed, and the horses bearing her to her future home. Then she turned round and stole a look at Mr. Towers.

She liked him. He was very tall, angular, and thin, punctiliously dressed and carefully shaved, and there was a pleasant kindness

in the face, and a genial courtesy in his whole bearing, which, if it had some of the stiffness, had all the chivalry of a long-past date. Kate felt that she was in good hands, —her new guardian was none the less a gentleman because he carried on a felt manufactory; and Kate's remembrances of home were such as to make her feel very grateful for that fact.

The horses stopped before one of the handsomest houses in Russell Square. The curtains all through were bright, fresh, and good; the windows glistened with spotless cleanliness; the door and window frames looked as if they had been painted but a week ago; it seemed a sin to sully the whiteness of the steps. There could hardly be a greater contrast than the exterior of her present home offered to that of the one Kate had just left. Mr. Towers assisted her to alight, with the same punctilious courtesy he

had shown throughout, and led her into the hall, where Mrs. Towers stood to receive her.

That lady kissed and welcomed her with an effusion that was very warm and pleasant, but that yet did not affect Kate so agreeably as the more measured cordiality of her husband. Then she led her into the dining-room, "to rest yourself, my dear, after the fatigue of the journey before I show you your bed-room."

The dining-room was large and handsomely furnished. The bronzes were good, the pictures well-chosen specimens of the modern school. Its newness and freshness, even more than the air of wealth and comfort that pervaded it, struck Kate agreeably. It was quite pleasant to walk on a carpet that was not threadbare, and to look on curtains that were not worn to cobwebs. There was nothing, as she told herself, that money could not buy,—not a thing that had not

been ten years since either in a shop or on the walls of the Academy; but the money had been well laid out, and the result was a room that gave you at once the idea of refined and luxurious comfort.

"Miss Randal will take a glass of wine after her journey," suggested Mr. Towers; "and you won't keep her long waiting for her dinner, my dear."

"Of course she will have some wine at once," said Mrs. Towers, ringing the bell for glasses, "and something more solid as soon as she has taken off her things."

She spoke in the most genial tone possible. If she had not been stout, homely, and at least fifty-three, one would have called it positively gushing. As it was, Kate felt sure that the owner of such a voice as that would be a most liberal provider of creature comforts, and as she was now really hungry, and, like most healthy girls of her age,

generally bleat with a good appetite, this assurance was a pleasant one. The butler (he was really an imposing person) brought out two decanters, and his mistress said, in a low tone,—“Ginger, Dawkins, and the cake.”

Dawkins produced some solid home-made cake and a third decanter, from which he was about to fill the glasses, when his master motioned him to leave the room, and, pouring out a glass of port, handed it himself to Kate.

Mrs. Towers looked a little vexed. If Kate had not had that glass of port there would have been enough in the decanter for dinner—now it would be necessary to open another bottle. She took half a glass of ginger wine herself, and praised its virtues, medicinally. Mr. Towers acquiesced in all she said, but took sherry himself, and, after a few moments, rose, asking Kate to excus

him, as it was necessary for him to return to Whitechapel.

Kate sipped her wine and ate some biscuits. She had noticed that when Dawkins had left the room Mr. Towers had himself produced a richly-chased cake-basket from the sideboard, with some very tempting wine-biscuits in it, and handed it to her, taking one himself. Mrs. Towers took a piece of the cake, and, when her husband had gone, pressed it upon Kate, extolling its good qualities. Kate took some, and scrutinized her hostess while she ate it. She had a plain face, but not an unpleasant one; it was kindly, shrewd, and good-tempered. She must have been one of those women who look elderly as soon as they enter middle-age, and it was difficult to imagine that at any period she could have been young. She was below the middle height and decidedly stout, but it was only a pleasant, comfortable

stoutness, that did not at all interfere with the activity of her movements. Her accents were refined, and her grammar unquestionable; but had Kate met her under other circumstances, she would at once have set her down for a housekeeper or a highly-respectable upper maid-servant. She was convinced that the silk dress Mrs. Towers wore was turned, and the ribbons in her cap—evidently a home-made one—dyed. Economy was Mrs. Towers's leading quality. She was the best-natured woman in the world when it did not cost her anything out of pocket to be so. Her excessive prudence was doubly creditable, inasmuch as she had not, and never had had, the slightest occasion to practise it. She had brought her husband a very pleasant addition to his income, which, even when she married him, was a good one, and his business had increased to such an extent that even she could not blame him

for extravagance when he removed to Russell Square and started his brougham. Having married late in life, they had never had children, and Mrs. Towers's days had rolled on in a calm, placid routine, only disturbed by occasional differences with the cook as to the articles required for domestic consumption, or unspoken regrets at the outlay in which her husband thought fit to indulge.

She was a very attached and very obedient wife, and would never have dreamed of disputing her husband's will,—nay, more, she tried hard to believe that whatever he thought it right and fit to do, that thing was safest, wisest, and best to be done—and, above all, most economical. He had no occasion to persuade her into compliance; her faith in him was so implicit that the bare announcement of his will was sufficient. On his part, Mr. Towers treated his wife with great forbearance, and that same old-

fashioned courtesy which had no charm for Kate; and as, on the whole, ~~the house and~~ table were generally regulated according to his wishes, while his wife had a sufficient latitude in matters which were beyond his interference, both parties had a right to be satisfied with themselves and with each other.

When Kate had with some difficulty swallowed her piece of hard, gritty cake (she could not help wondering, while doing so, what the boys at home would have said if Milly had manufactured such a one for their consumption), Mrs. Towers offered to show her to her bed-room. She led her up the richly-carpeted stairs with their massive brass rods, and paused at the entrance of the drawing-rooms that Kate might have a glimpse of their glories. These apartments were the very pride and delight of Mrs. Towers's heart. Her husband had frightened her at first by the expense to which he had

gone in furnishing them; but when they were completed, great as the outlay had been upon them, she could scarcely regret it. A first-rate upholsterer had been charged to do whatever was requisite both in these rooms, the dining-room, library, and Mr. and Mrs. Towers's bed-room, and the best spare chamber. He had also been entrusted with the furnishing of the hall and staircase. The rest of the house had been left to Mrs. Towers; and Kate was struck by the difference between her own scantily-furnished apartment and those which Mrs. Towers, with exultant pride, had shown to her. It was a little room on the second floor, and Mrs. Towers pointed out to Kate the advantages it possessed in being so near her own. Then she offered to assist her in unpacking and arranging her dresses in the small old-fashioned wardrobe, picked up a bargain, second-hand, in Gray's Inn Lane.

"Thank you, it won't take me long. I've not many dresses," said Kate.

"Quite right, too, my dear; they only get old-fashioned before they're half worn out if you've too many at a time. Besides, I think, myself, the less spent on dress the better. It's astonishing how much some people waste upon it. I'm sure we shall get on famously if you are not disposed that way."

"I never had the chance of spending much," said Kate, with the utmost candour, "or else I dare say I should have been quite as ready to have wasted money as other girls. I think I'll put this dress on to come downstairs in. I shall be quite glad to take off the one I'm wearing, it is so soiled and dusty with travelling. But I had some disagreeable fellow-passengers, who smelt of smoke and trod on my skirts with their muddy boots; but I suppose one must expect



to meet such people sometimes in second-class carriages."

"You came second-class! Now I do admire you for that!" said Mrs. Towers, warmly. "I think it's a much safer way of travelling for a lady than first-class, and the saving is really enormous. In fact, my dear, in fine weather I'd just as soon go third if it were not for Mr. Towers. But he has his little fancies in some matters, as most gentlemen have, you know."

Kate remembered the involuntary look of surprise which had flitted for a moment across Mr. Towers's face as he saw her in a second-class carriage, and could quite understand that neither second nor third class travelling would be in accordance with his ideas of what was suitable for anybody connected with him, and she said,—“I don't deserve any credit for it. I travelled by the second-class because the money couldn't

possibly be spared for me to travel first. Things are very different with us at The Grange to what they were. Mrs. Towers."

"I suppose so, my dear; I suppose so," was the reply, spoken in a very kindly and sympathizing tone. "Now, can I do anything more for you, or would you like to be left to yourself? Yes, I thought so. Well, ring the bell, and the housemaid will come if you want anything. You'll find her a willing, obliging girl, but a little awkward, not having long left the country. I don't like your London servants, with their dress and their airs; and then the wages! And don't dress for dinner; Mr. Towers dines in the City to-day, and won't be home till late, and I always have an early dinner myself when that is so. Besides, I thought your tea, and a little cold meat or a chop with it, would be so much more refreshing after your journey. So don't be long, my dear, and

you'll find everything ready for you when you come down."

"I hope the chop will be a big one," thought Kate, "for I'm terribly hungry. I'm afraid papa was so far right that Mrs. Towers is a screw; but I'm sure she's a very good-natured one."

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFE AT BARLEIGH.

MILLCENT RANDAL'S life was a dull one after her sister had left her. Harry Corder never came near The Grange, and though she saw him now and then, it was only by stealth, and such interviews preyed on a conscience which Kate had once told her was too tender by half. As to giving up Harry, that was out of the question. All Millicent's ideas of obedience fell short of that. They must wait and hope, and meanwhile bear on as best they might.

Harry did not tell her of his troubles with his own people. There was no need to vex her with them, and, besides, Harry was ashamed of the view they took of matters.

But he spoke hopefully of making a home for her before very long, if not in England, elsewhere ; and he went on as quietly as he could at home while waiting for a suitable opportunity of leaving it. Mr. Randal had punished himself in punishing his daughter, for now that Kate was gone, and there was no chance of Harry Corder dropping in to whist, he found his days long and his evenings insupportable. Then he took to strolling down to Barleigh, where the enterprising landlord of the Parade Hotel, a small inn near the church, had opened a billiard-room. Mr. Randal found congenial society here ; men who were flattered by his presence, and quite ready to acknowledge his superior science in the game, and who felt honoured by being allowed to lose their money to him. His absence was an immense relief to his daughter, especially as she had not the slightest idea where he spent his

evenings, but imagined he had made some new acquaintance, of whom he did not choose to speak, or else passed them in solitary rambles by the sea. No matter which it was, she had her evenings to herself and the boys, for making (but that was rarely) new garments and repairing old ones, for helping Reginald with his lessons, and hearing Walter read his French, and Norman his history.

The boys were not bad, but they *were* "boys" — turbulent, difficult to rule, and with a hearty, sturdy, thorough-going aversion to study. Still, the evenings alone with them and her work-basket were a delightful change from those which Mr. Randal spent at home; and when they had gone to bed, and had ceased the skirmishing on the stairs, and the inroads into each other's bed-rooms, which generally precluded that process, there was a quiet time

for thought of the sister far away in the great London world, and the lover near her in the quiet farmhouse nestling beneath the hills.

On the whole, those dull, monotonous days of Millicent's were not without their passing gleams of brightness; and if it never once occurred to her that she had made and was making the greatest mistake a woman can make—that of fancying she loves a man himself, instead of the affection he gives her; of regarding as her possible ruler, whose will is to be her law, and to whom she is willing to give the unquestioning reverence, the implicit obedience that one like her would hold as only the idol's due, one who is mentally her inferior, and whose intellectual height she must inevitably outgrow before many years had passed—why, just now so much the better for her. She needed a little comfort, poor heart! in

how ~~the~~ ~~very~~ days, which were so different from what he ~~days~~ of twenty-one should be. Still, it was to be hoped that Millicent would either find out her mistake in time, and learn that ~~Harry~~ ~~Lowrie~~ was only a good-looking, well-meaning young farmer, and anything but the ~~very~~ ~~worst~~ man she was thinking him, or else never find it out at all.

And at this time little Horace Orville began to find that he had lost his idol. Sunday after Sunday the young Randalls sat in their pew, and sucked their lozenges, and kicked out their legs, and made faces at each other, and sometimes, to the horror of both Millicent and Miss Williams, at the meekest and demurest of the latter's pupils; and their elder sister was there, with a face as pale and calm as ever; but she whose saddened beauty had so won upon the boy's heart never came. Horace was greatly troubled. Was she ill, that she stayed away?

No, he could not think that. He had a great fund of imagination, but he found it powerless to picture Kate Randal with her beauty faded by illness, or her steps slow and feeble with disease. She seemed so full of life, of health and energy — what had sickness or pain to do with her? Was she angry with him, and so kept from church? Horace felt a thrill of inexpressible delight at the idea. To think of her noticing him enough for that! If he could only see her and beg her pardon, and tell her how impossible it was to keep his eyes from her, she would surely forgive him, and come again to church, and let him look his fill. But if she never came in his way, how should he make his peace? he thought, despairingly; and when Sunday after Sunday went on, and still the boys and Millicent came without their sister, he grew more and more troubled and unhappy.

There was no question about it; if Kate Randal was never to have another lover, she had one now in this boy of twelve. He was growing pale and thin with suspense; and had not Miss Williams been very much pre-occupied in her own affairs just then, she could not have failed to notice the alteration in her favourite pupil. But a wonderful event had befallen Amy Williams. She had received an offer, her very first,—some one at last had really thought fit to fall in love with quiet Amy Williams; and, out of sheer gratitude for such a very unlooked-for honour, she could not help accepting him. It is true the lover was only a young tradesman from the neighbouring town, who had become acquainted with Amy through some of his little cousins being under her charge, and Mrs. Sims waxed wroth when, she heard of it, and lectured Amy for a whole hour upon the

loss of caste involved in her marrying an ironmonger. But there was a good home offered to the girl, without the necessity for the continuous exertion which already was beginning to tell upon her; so that Amy had been induced to lay aside her gentility, and listen to the suit of a good, honest man, even though he *was* engaged in trade.

And Amy's lover had behaved, too, in a manner which of itself would have won her heart. The quarterly remittances from Mr. Orville had stopped for the last six months. She had written again and again, and her letters had been unanswered, and then returned unopened, with an intimation that no such person was longer known at Swithin's Lane. This was a very serious affair, and Amy at once consulted both Mr. and Mrs. Sims. The latter reminded her that she had always, from the first, advised her to have nothing to do with a child

who came of such a disreputable stock, and the former advised her to write at once to Mr. Lawrence Horton, stating the whole case, and asking if he could give her no assistance in tracing the Mr. Orville for whom he had received letters from her.

The reply was very short, and unpleasantly to the purpose, stating that Mr. Orville was personally unknown to the firm, and that the letters had only been taken in for him, to oblige a mutual acquaintance, of whom Messrs. Horton had for some time past lost sight. Mrs. Sims was again mournfully triumphant at this further proof of her sagacity, and Mr. Sims now knew not what further to advise, beyond an early application by Amy to the workhouse guardians to take Horace off her hands, upon which Miss Williams did what till then her landlord had believed her incapable of doing—lost her temper, and almost quarrelled both

with him and Mrs. Sims, declaring that the boy should never go to the workhouse till she did so too ! Then she left No. 5, Brunswick Terrace, and ran in, with her eyes red and her cheeks flushed—for her little gust of passion had ended in tears—to No. 6. There she found the young iron-monger, Mr. Richard Waring, waiting for her, and to him, on the spur of the moment, she unfolded her troubles. She was scarcely prepared for the very summary manner in which he settled them.

“ If you ’ll share my home, Amy Williams, you ’re welcome to bring the lad with you. There ’s plenty for all ; and if I say I ’ll try to do a father’s part by him as well as you have done a mother’s, I think I’ve promised as much as any man can fairly look to perform.”

That settled the matter. Mr. Richard Waring secured his bride, as he deserved to do, by this generous offer, and it is scarcely

to be wondered at if, amidst all the flutter of this new state of things,—the preparation of her trousseau, the disposal of her school to the best advantage,—Amy Williams overlooked her pet pupil a little. If she had not done so, I am afraid even her own situation would have failed to render her susceptible to his. She would have distressed herself very much about the loss of his appetite, and troubled her brother the doctor with fifty guesses as to its cause; but I am sure the last solution she would ever have hit on would have been that he had lost his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

THE IDOL IN THE DUST.

It was about a fortnight after Horace Orville's fate had been settled for him by Mr. Richard Waring, that Mattie, now Mrs. Gibson, drove over from her husband's farm to pay a visit to her cousin. Mattie looked as if things went well with her. Her black silk gown rustled in its richness, her bonnet was the gayest that had been seen for one while in Barleigh, and her shawl, gloves, and boots were all of a very different quality from anything she had been able to obtain while a teacher with her cousin. There was no doubt that if she had lost a little in caste she had gained a great deal in comfort by her marriage, for over her whole face and

There was indeed a misunderstanding which had arisen at the time of the late marriage and a misunderstanding which I was a little misunderstanding in fact of marriage only to lose a little.

The part in the little parlour drawn by a thick red brick work the second little parlour in the Parade House and then valued in with a small house in the same full of her children will find to form the little parlour. There was nothing but. It was nothing but the children were in the with the exception of Henry who was never to be allowed to stay in home on any of a holiday and who was quite and will then ever with an old volume of Shakespeare which Miss Williams had lent him in a corner of her little best parlour.

"I don't know what ails the child," said Amy, anxiously, after she had kissed her cousin. "He doesn't look himself, does he?"

"The hot weather," replied Mattie. "I

never knew such a September. The sun's full on his head where he sits. Take him up into your room—that's always cool—and let him lie down."

"Dear, dear, to think of my not noticing the child," cried Amy, with some self-reproach. "Come, Horry, and bring your book. It's enough to make any one's head ache sitting where you do."

Mattie took off her things and smoothed her hair, while Amy laid Horace on her own little bed. Mattie looked better without her bonnet even than with it. Her round, plain face had acquired a comeliness of its own, the result of easy circumstances and a happy life, and as Amy looked, she wondered if marriage would do as much for her as it had for her cousin. After all, there were other things worth living for besides gentility. Never in all her life had she worn such a silk dress as now sat so well upon Mattie's

plump, buxom figure, and she could not remember the time when her face had been as free from care as was Mattie's, in spite of her household and her children.

They went down to the best parlour; it had lost something of its usual primness, being littered over with dress-pieces and lengths of calico and linen. Mr. Waring was anxious to be married as soon as possible, and his bride-elect had gone with him, on the preceding half-holiday, to Bridgeton to make her purchases. It was to advise upon the best way of making these up that Mattie, as an experienced matron, had been called in. She looked fully conscious of the responsibility of her position, and entered eagerly into the whole matter, discussing the qualities of every dress before her, advising, directing, measuring, with intense interest, till Amy sent her thoughts into another channel by acquainting her with the generosity

of her intended husband as regarded Horace.

“Well, he *is* good,” said Mattie, with effusion; “but dear, dear! it’s a great responsibility to take upon one’s self. That child will never turn out well. It’s not in the nature of things. He couldn’t, I believe, if he were to try.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” answered her cousin. “Any way, he’s good enough now—the least trouble of any boy I have.”

“Yes, yes; it’s all very well for a while, but, you know, there’s bad in him, and it must break out sooner or later. It stands to reason—he can’t be like the child of decent people. Why, his father must be even worse than we thought for—a good-for-nothing brute!—to leave the poor helpless child like this on your hands. But I tell you what, Amy,” she continued, with sudden vivacity, “my belief is that Mr. Orville and Mr. Horton

are one and the same person, and that he or they—well, you know what I mean, it may be two names, but it's all one person—have got tired of paying for the poor child, who, if he is born bad, has only his father to thank for it, and are just doing all this to prevent being found out.”

“Well, it may be so,” replied Amy, thoughtfully, “but if it is, I don't see how I can help myself. If Mr. Horton or Orville won't pay, how ever can I make him?”

“Summon him to the County Court, or bring an action against him; there must be some way, you know, of making him pay. Go to a lawyer and ask him. I don't believe he'd charge you more than six and eightpence for telling you all about it; and I'm sure, for the sake of punishing the good-for-nothing creature alone, it would be money well spent.”

“But then, don't you see, if I'm not sure Mr. Horton is Mr. Orville, I can't bring an

action, or summon him, or do anything else that Mr. Price may advise me," replied Amy.

"Well, can't you make sure? Mr. Waring has to go up to London every now and then upon business. Ask him to call at Swithin's Lane, and get to see Mr. Horton."

"But he never saw Mr. Orville, so how will it be possible for him to tell whether he and Mr. Horton are the same?"

"Where's the photograph that wretched creature left with the child? It was the most wonderful likeness. Any one might know Mr. Orville or Horton from that."

Amy unlocked her workbox and took out the photograph. Mattie looked at it attentively. "Even if he's altered—and I don't think that's the kind of face that would alter much—he might be recognized from that. I'd let Mr. Waring take it up with him the next time he goes to town, and tell him to be sure and look in at Swithin's Lane. It's

very good of him to say he'll take this poor little creature, but the best of men don't care to be plagued with other people's children, and by-and-by you may have some of your own, remember, which may make all the difference."

"The photograph may be of use in finding Horry's father, but I shouldn't like to give up the child to him," said Amy, blushing a little at her cousin's last suggestion. "He can't be a proper person to take care of him."

"Of course he isn't! A good-for-nothing, heartless villain! But you needn't be afraid. He'll be in no hurry to take Horry off your hands, only there's no reason he shouldn't pay you something for keeping him and getting him out in the world."

Mattie took up another of the dresses, and Amy looked thoughtfully at the photograph she held. It was a vignette, full

face, and represented a young man, perhaps about thirty. The hair was light, and the features sufficiently marked to render it easy to take a striking likeness of him. On the first glance you thought it an easy, good-tempered face enough, with no worse fault in its expression than an overweening self-satisfaction. But if you looked more closely, you might read in the thin lips and the cold eyes signs of a man who would pause at little if his own interests or pleasures were in the way — whom great crimes might alarm possibly, because, from the very smallness and poorness of his nature, he would be incapable of being great in anything, either good or evil, but to whom little meannesses, small deceptions, shifts, evasions, would be second nature. A man who would like his pleasures, but who would wish to buy them cheaply,—with whom love would be a toy and affection a caprice,—a selfish, narrow

organization, which might be worked upon by the fear of shame or exposure, but never by the love of good.

Amy saw something of this, and sighed as she put the photograph away. "A bad man, Mattie, I'm afraid. Lord help the poor creature that he led into sin!"

"She might have known what she had to expect," replied Mattie, shortly. "I never waste my pity on such myself."

Tea was brought in now though it was but four o'clock, for Mattie had intimated that she must return early, and she was much too important a personage to take tea in the school-room or even in the second parlour. Mrs. Gibson was a person to be treated with some ceremony even in her cousin's house; besides, the occasion of her visit made this tea a little festal banquet, to which she was quite disposed to do justice.

"Your cream's as good as ours, Amy.

Mrs. Thorpe serves you well. I wonder how that child upstairs is getting on. A cup of this good strong tea, now, would be the very thing for his head."

"I'll take him one myself," said Amy. "Jane is so noisy she'll be sure to wake him if he should be asleep."

"Do, and a little bread and butter with it, or cake to tempt him. Children shouldn't take strong tea without eating something with it."

Mattie opened the door for her cousin, whose hands were now loaded, calling softly after her, "I wouldn't wake him on any account if he's asleep." Then she sat down and sipped her own tea, murmuring, "She'll never rear him—children with that look he has never live—and it will be a good thing if she doesn't. He's sure to turn out ill. What else could be expected of a child that comes of such a father and mother?"

When Amy entered her room she found

Horace kneeling by the window, his head supported by his hands, and looking out with such intentness on the churchyard and the sea beyond it that he did not hear her. She put down the cup and plate, and coming up, touched him gently. "What are you doing there, Horry?"

"Thinking."

"That won't do your head any good. Is it better now? Boys like you are too young to think of anything but their lessons or their play. Come and drink this tea; or will you come downstairs with me and take it there? Only, wash your hands first, for Mrs. Gibson is more precise than I am, as I daresay you remember."

Horace stayed behind to make his toilet, and Amy went down and informed her cousin how she had found him, and of the answer he had given her. Mattie shook her head. "Boys have no right to think. It never does them any

good. How should it, when it's against all nature for them to do it? You'll have him laid up if he goes on like this. I'll tell you what, Amy, will be the best thing for him to-day: I'll drive him back with me to fetch those patterns I told you of; he shall have a good swing with the children, and walk home by the tots. The drive and the sea together will quite stop his thoughts for to-night, at any rate."

The boy must be love-lorn indeed whom the prospect of a ride, when it comes so rarely as it did to Horace, would not cheer up a little. Soon after five, Horace found himself by Mrs. Gibson's side, watching her drive, and listening to her good-humoured chatter with almost as much interest as if there had been no Miss Randal in the world. They were not long in reaching Thorpe Farm, and Mrs. Gibson took care that for the hour that Horace stayed with her he should

have no time for thought. She showed him her children, stood by while he swung the little ones, and then, while one of the boys about the place swung the child, took Horace to see her favourite cow and her fattest pig; then, telling him it was time to go, directed him how to return by the sea-shore, and sent him homewards with the patterns done up in one parcel, a huge segment of cake for his own consumption in another, and his pockets full of the ripest apples from the orchard, telling him, at the same time, with a little air of mystery, that it might not be very long before Miss Williams would be leaving home for a while, in which case he was to come and stay with her.

Horace walked home, feeling (thanks to the drive, the swing, and the promised visit to the farm) much more like a boy of twelve than he had done for some time past. He was soon on the summit of the tots with the

sea spread below him, and the sun sinking into it in his evening splendour. It was a beautiful sight. Horace thought he could not do better than sit down and enjoy it, especially as he had an apple to munch while he did so; and, as it was a much nearer way to Barleigh from Thorpe Farm by the tots than by the road, he should still be home before dark. He had not sat very long, however, when his meditation and his munching were alike interrupted by a small stone thrown lightly at him, and looking round he saw on a slight elevation, at a little distance from him, a boy of about his own age—much more shabbily dressed though, and not in the habit, to judge by appearances, of paying that careful attention to the nicety of his collar and hair which Miss Williams exacted from her pupils. But Horace's heart beat quickly as he looked upon the young gentleman who stood there, surveying him with

supercilious glances, for he recognized the eldest of the Randal boys whom he saw every Sunday in the dingy old family pew—*her* brother, in short. Could he, would he tell him anything of *her*?

Master Reginald sat down on the little hillock, and asked, — “Ain’t you one of Mother Williams’s lot?”

“I belong to Miss Williams’s school, if that’s what you mean,” replied Horace, who never indulged in slang himself, and had a great distaste for it in others.

“All right; she’s the party. I say, whatever does your father send you to school to a woman for? I wonder you stand it. I wouldn’t, if I were you.”

“I’ve got no father,” replied Horace, mournfully. He had been brought up in the belief that he was an orphan. Mrs. Sims had advised this, and Mattie had quite agreed with her, adding, that it was no more than

the truth, for "a child with such a father and mother as that couldn't be said to have any relations at all."

"Ah, well, I sometimes wish *I* hadn't," said Reginald, with great frankness. "He's a rum one, ours is—a regular rum one, especially when he turns rusty; but, I say, don't you find school with a mistress precious slow? I did, I know, when my sister had to teach us—couldn't stand it at last; so the governor had to give in, and send me to Speedwell's."

Here was an opening. Horace made the most of it. "Which sister? the one with dark hair?"

"That you're spooney on? Catch her at it! No, it's Milly does all the fagging in our house. Kate isn't a flat, I'll say that for her, and the governor don't try his little games on with her. But, I say, how you used to stare! We used to chaff her once or twice,

but it's not much use doing that with Kate. She turns so precious rusty."

His idol "rusty" and not a "flat"! Horace felt himself lowered as well as her by hearing her so spoken of. Reginald, who was in a very communicative mood, and saw, too, that the other had been eating, came and sat down by him. "Have you got any more apples than you know what to do with?" he asked.

Horace emptied his pockets. Anything to propitiate Reginald, and get him to talk again of his sister, though he hoped it would not be in slang.

"I'm precious hungry," observed Reginald, selecting the largest apple. "You see Speedwell's—Toozle we call him—is too far off for me to come home to dinner, so I take it with me. I might dine there for a little extra, but the governor's a screw, and won't stand it; and I laid my bread

and meat down under a hedge while I was playing football, and a dog bolted it. Then Tootle kept me—out of sheer aggravation, I know—because I wanted my tea a little earlier, so that I'm half-starved now. I told Snooks and the Weazel to meet me, but I suppose they gave it up as a bad job, and went back an hour ago."

"Snooks and the Weazel?" asked Horace, with a little severity.

"Norman and Wal. I think I gave them those names at first just because Kate didn't want me to. I always liked putting her in a wax if I could. How good these apples are! We've got lots, but we never have any without stealing them; and if it isn't an out-and-out shame for a fellow to have to prig his own, I don't know what is!"

"I suppose your papa—" began Horace.

"Don't call him papa! It's bosh! Only girls do it! No, you wouldn't think

it," continued Reginald, with indescribable contempt, "but the governor's mean enough to sell the apples, as they grow, for cider! And the orchard's some way from the house, and fenced in, so that our only chance of having any is by getting up early in the morning and pocketing the windfalls. Sometimes he catches us at it, and swears like a good one; then Milly spins Snooks and Weazel a yarn, but of course they're not going to be guided by a girl, if she's ever such a good sort, and Milly's not so bad."

"I—I have some cake here," said Horace, anxious to propitiate his new friend.

"Hand it over! You're a regular brick," said Reginald, graciously.

Horace felt flattered, and ventured to observe,—

"I—I hope Miss Randal didn't mind my looking at her in church? She—she didn't think me rude?"

“Don’t suppose she cared. You’re too young, you know, for her to think much about it. But you won’t have the chance of looking again. She’s gone to London.”

“Gone to London!” repeated Horace, faintly.

“Yes—I say, this cake’s stunning! She’s been there this month. Shouldn’t wonder but she’ll get married. I’ll take another apple if you’ll hand them over. She’s not so bad-looking, isn’t Kate, considering,” remarked Reginald, critically; “and I dare say she’ll pick up some flat or another where she’s gone. Won’t he catch a Tartar!”

Horace felt too miserable to speak. He saw his idol crumbling to pieces before him. This dreadful young iconoclast, Reginald, was shattering her with a sledge-hammer. His lady of romance a Tartar! She whose face, with its changeful, cloudy beauty, had

seemed to him the embodiment of all the heroines of whom he had ever read, the realization of all the poetry he had ever conned over till he knew it almost by heart, would pick up some flat and marry him ! She whom he had thought princes might woo in vain, and monarchs be proud to wed ! He would have liked to cry, but he felt ashamed ; and there sat that pitiless Reginald, munching cake and apples with as much unconcern as if he had not, in return for all these dainties, broken the heart of the donor. Would he never have done eating, and let him, Horace, go on his miserable way alone ? It was dreadful to see him clearing up the crumbs of cake, and eating the very pips of the apples, with as much unconcern as if there were no Kate Randal in the world to be cruelly maligned to her trusting worshipper. And, oh dear ! oh dear ! he might have done worse than malign her,

he might have spoken the truth! It was dreadful to think of, but hadn't he known her all his life, and wasn't he her brother?

Reginald had finished at last, and rose. "I must be off now. Catch me learning my lessons for to-morrow, though! I don't see how old Toozle can expect it when he keeps a fellow in to this time of night. Good-bye, I'll look out for you next Sunday, when Mother Williams has got her eyes turned another way. And if you want some one to be spooney on—I know some fellows always do—take up with Milly; that's the other. I don't say she's as good-looking as Kate, but she's as good again every other way; for a girl, she's about the best sort I know. If you think she'll do, just wink three times at the end of the sermon, and I'll find some way of coming to have a talk with you about her. Perhaps you'll have some more of these apples next week."

Then Reginald went on his way, and left Horace even more miserable than when he had started upon his, feeling as if in this world there could never again be any one worth believing in or caring for. Had not the lady of his dreams been pronounced a vixen, and had she not gone to London to sell her face to any fool who might care to be its purchaser? She was doubly lost now, for even if he were to see her again, would she ever be worth the worshipping more?

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. TOWERS AT HOME.

MRS. TOWERS had been induced to receive *Kate* under her charge principally to please her husband. For herself, she would not have cared to undertake the responsibility of such an inmate. But *Mr. Towers* remembered his two young cousins, and knew quite enough of *Mr. Randal* to be convinced that a home with him would be the very worst and most unsuitable that a girl could have. And he liked young people; it had been one of the very few disappointments of his prosperous life that children had never come to bless his marriage. Like many another man, he did not quite understand his wife, and fancied that, though she said nothing on

the subject, she shared his feelings, and that a bright, pleasant, pretty girl about the house, whom they might come in time to regard almost as their own daughter, would be a very charming addition to all the unmistakable comforts and luxuries which he had already placed there. Mrs. Towers assented to all her husband suggested. After a time she liked the idea so well, that she began to believe it had emanated from herself; and that, in addition to all besides that it had to recommend it, it would have the crowning virtue of economy—and at first the expense of another member in their household had alarmed her a little.

A young girl would look after the servants, and help her in checking the wasteful expenditure of coals, gas, cheese, butter, and every other consumable article that was constantly going on in the lower regions of the house. She might make herself so useful,

too, in the little parties which Mrs. Towers so delighted in giving. She was the most hospitable woman in the world if she could only do it cheaply. It cost so much to hire a pianiste, as much really as, with management, would pay for the cost of a supper, leaving out the wine; and when Mr. Towers was from home, it was astonishing how very little wine his wife would make suffice for a party of twenty-five. He was very often away upon business; and though Mrs. Towers would not have owned it even to herself, she enjoyed her little festivities a great deal more in his absence than when he shared them. It went to her very heart to see the manner in which he would bring out his best wine, and to know the reckless orders that were given to the butler and the pastry-cook. She was not afraid of Mr. Towers ruining himself by over-extravagance; indeed, she had too much unquestioning faith in him

to doubt his wisdom in anything; but there was such an inexpressible charm in making fifteen shillings do the work of fifty, of bringing into play all the manifold little contrivances to save this and do without that,—there was such a pleasure in buying composite candles at half the price of wax, and thinking that they looked almost as well, and had no smell at all to speak of,—in giving people cheap wine (and very little of it), and reflecting with complacency on all the goodly row of cobwebbed or long-necked bottles still reposing in the cellar,—in having home-made pastry and jellies, and her cook was not a first-rate one—Mr. Towers could do a great deal, but he could not engage the female domestics,—and in having only a standing supper, where the most solid dishes were sandwiches, instead of the more expensive dainties, with all their accompaniments, which Mr. Towers always con-

sidered indispensable to the quietest evening gathering.

She really was a good-hearted woman, and thoroughly enjoyed seeing her friends; but I think the greatest pleasure she had in entertaining them was the thought how cheaply she had done it.

Kate was a little disappointment to Mrs. Towers. In the first place, she showed herself most unsympathizing in her troubles with her servants; and in the next, she was a very indifferent musician, and openly avowed that if she played quadrilles it would be impossible for any one to dance to them. Neither was she handy at her needle, which Mrs. Towers had hoped might prove to be the case; and she looked sorrowfully at the old dresses and worn cloaks, which she had thought a girl brought up in a poor home would know how to do such wonders with. But still the house was more attractive now

a young girl was in it—there was no question of that. Sometimes Mrs. Towers had been afraid that her house was a little, just a little dull, and her invitations were not always so promptly responded to as they had been; but people were rather curious about this careless, handsome Miss Randal, of whom Mrs. Towers whispered such mysterious things, and of the fallen fortunes of whose family she spoke so mournfully. Mrs. Towers was rather proud of the girl, too. She had done her best to cause her to be considered a princess in disguise, and Kate looked the part to perfection. Then, too, she read beautifully; and Mr. Towers had been a great reader in his time, but his eyes were failing him now, and his wife's reading of his favourite books was an infliction that even his courtesy could not induce him to submit to. Kate was ready to read by the hour together. She had pretty well

exhausted the library at home, to which no book had been added for the last thirty years, and it seemed at first an inexhaustible pleasure to have access to Mr. Towers's well-filled book-shelves, where, in addition to all the old classics, with which she was already so familiar, Dickens and Thackeray, Macaulay and Carlyle, Tennyson and Browning stood, a goodly company. She had a quick, keen intellect,—a woman's intellect, if you will,—with more of instinct and sympathy than of depth or force in it. But she was unmistakably clever, a girl worth talking to and directing—all the better worth talking to that she had an opinion of her own in most matters, which she was not at all too ready to give up, unless thoroughly convinced that there were good reasons for her doing so. Mr. Towers grew fond of this girl, who filled up a vacuum in his life which his wife, with all her obedience and affection, never could,

and Mrs. Towers then found herself quite ready to be fond of her, too.

Mr. Towers wished the girl, whom he had in some measure adopted, to be happy under his roof. Once, when they were young men together, Mr. Randal, at that time looked upon as the future head of his family, had, in some rare moment of generosity, conferred a pecuniary benefit upon his then poor and struggling cousin. It was a little thing for him to do, but it happened to be a great one for James Towers to receive, and he never forgot the obligation. He had returned it, in spite of his wife's remonstrances, ten-fold, years back, and would have done so twenty-fold had he not seen at last that all he could do was only paving the way to fresh disgrace and more utter ruin. But still, as he was one of those rare beings who never forget a benefit, he was glad to return it to one, at least, of his cousin's children; and, as

whatever he did was done courteously and thoroughly, he had no wish to repay his fancied obligation to Frederick Randal by letting his daughter occupy nothing but a dependent's position under his roof. He wished her to be happy there, and to feel herself the child of the house, and to mix with the society that frequented it on pleasant and equal terms. He took an early opportunity, when alone with her, of putting her pecuniary affairs on a safe and pleasant footing. Some men might have left this to their wives, but Mr. Towers knew *his* wife too well. Her ideas and his of a suitable allowance for a young lady were so totally different, that he would not inflict the pain upon her of being the bearer of his generosity. Therefore, when Kate had been there a week, —quite time enough for Mr. Towers to see that her wardrobe was more in accordance with his wife's ideas than with his own,—he

and Mrs
ready to

Mr. To

in some m

his roof.

together, M

upon as the fu

some rare mo

a pecuniary ben

struggling cousin

him to do, but it h

for James Towers

forgot the obligation.

in spite of his wife's rei

years back, and would h

fold had he not seen at las

do was only paving the w

grace and more utter ruin.

was one of those rare being

forget a benefit, he was glad to

one, at least, of his cousin's child

presented her one morning, when they were alone together, with a twenty-pound note.

“Dress is expensive, I believe, my dear, in London; therefore you won’t mind taking this from your old cousin; and, as I hope your stay with us will be a long one, and you will have many little calls upon your purse that you had not in Barleigh, perhaps it will be as well for you to know at once on what you may rely to meet them with. Whatever allowance your papa may have thought fit to make you, you must let me increase by sixty pounds a year, and we’ll consider this the first quarter.”

Twenty pounds! In all her life Kate had never had so much. She took it without any shame, for Mr. Towers’s fatherly, gentlemanly forbade that; but she said, with a little bitterness,—“My father let me leave his home without the promise of any allowance whatever, and with just twenty

shillings in my purse after my fare was paid."

"My dear, my dear, he has his troubles," said Mr. Towers, with a slight shade of reproof underlying the gentleness of his voice; "and he knew that you were coming to your kinsfolk, who would let you want for nothing. Now take up Carlyle, and let us go on with 'Sartor Resartus.'"

Kate sent a black silk dress to Millicent out of the twenty pounds, and laid out the rest in a manner that gave Mr. Towers much more satisfaction than it did his wife. The girl liked, as all girls do like, pretty dresses and bright surroundings, and lost something of her imperious wilfulness when she saw herself attired in a manner in accordance with her position, while the solid, unmistakable comforts of her present home, which were very considerable in spite of the economical tendencies of its mistress, all

tended to soften the asperities of her temper.

Their influence went no further, though. Nay, if anything, although apparently more amiable, Kate was decidedly the worse for her sojourn in Russell Square. She had suffered so much and so keenly for the want of money at The Grange, and here every moment of her life gave her such tangible evidences of what money alone could do, that she was becoming more its worshipper than ever. Even her new course of reading did not do much to counteract this. She studied her favourite authors only with her mind; into her heart not one of their utterances found entrance. She was proud of her powers of appreciation, flattered when Mr. Towers talked to her of the books she read to him, and day by day, as she felt her intellect expanding, rejoiced that she had come to London for something more than mere material good.

But of the highest good of all—that good which the lowliest may achieve, and the mightiest fail to win—Kate Randal never thought. If she had had a heart given her for any other purposes than an anatomical one, she was, as yet, unconscious of it—it was callous and torpid within her : some day it might wake to life, with as many throbs and pains as one recalled from the grave might feel ; but, till it did, it lay a thing of flesh and blood indeed, but as hard and unresponsive to the voice of passion or the pleadings of tenderness, as if it rested in the bosom of a mummy of a thousand years.

She liked Mr. Towers very much, and Mrs. Towers gave her a great deal of amusement. Their circle of friends was not altogether what she would have wished it to be, but it did well enough. There were a few clever people, and a great many moneyed ones. Mr. Towers enjoyed the society of

the former, and tolerated that of the latter. The people that he least liked were those who could not be exactly classed amongst either set, who certainly made no pretensions to talent, but a great deal to wealth; and Mrs. Towers was in the habit of asking these to her little economical suppers when her husband was out of the way. They belonged to a set in which she had mixed before her marriage, and she had been too good-natured altogether to give them up. Besides, she liked showing her new splendours in their eyes, and they were very ready to be dazzled. These were the people with whom Katherine got on the worst of all. The clever people awed her a little—very little—Kate was not disposed to be too reverential to any one; and the rich ones, however stupid, still impressed her with the great and unmistakable fact of their wealth. She found herself compelled to be civil to them, perhaps

respected them a little more than she did the geniuses; but she had very little patience with the guests who came on her aunt's off-nights. If they had only been honestly poor, and owned it, she would have tolerated them with what patience she best could; but it was the intolerable assumption of wealth, the ineffable vulgarity of aping what they had not, that disgusted her. On these nights Kate was always in her most disagreeable moods; they bored her, and she took but little pains to hide it, and even Mrs. Towers's small economies lost their amusement when repeated too often.

She was sitting one night, a few weeks before Christmas, in the front drawing-room at Russell Square. Mr. Towers was away, and his wife had taken the opportunity of giving one of those little entertainments in which she specially delighted. Kate had been required to assist in the preparations.

She had cut up the cake,—a home-made, gritty, treacle-coloured substance,—and got out the best china and glass (as Mrs. Towers said, as there *was* the china and glass, it really cost no more to use it, if people would only be careful, than to let it remain in the china-closet); and she had helped to take off the drawing-room covers, and assisted in the decoration of the supper-table, Mrs. Towers all the while superintending and directing with a genial heartiness that would have been perfectly in keeping if her guests had been coming to a Lord Mayor's banquet, instead of to the display of china, glass, sandwiches, and weak sherry, to which they had been invited.

“It all looks charming, doesn't it, my dear?” asked Mrs. Towers, with one of her most beaming looks. “I only wish Mr. Towers were here; but he does not care much for company—never did. Now, no-

thing ever gives me so much pleasure as to see my friends about me."

"Especially when you can do it for fourpence-halfpenny a head," thought Kate. Then she added aloud, with tolerable graciousness,—“If there is nothing more I can do, shall I go and dress?”

Mrs. Towers assented, and went to make her own toilet. Then Kate, having smoothed her hair, and put on her most unbecoming dress,—she had a perverse pleasure in making herself look her worst for these people,—went and sat down, as I have said, in the front drawing-room, and, taking up Tennyson's last poem, which Mr. Towers had bought two days before, sat down to complete its perusal.

“I hope they'll be late, every one of them,” she said, glancing at the clock. “But they're sure to be early—stupid people are always to their time. I wonder what makes them so punctual, and I wonder

very much why stupid people were created at all. I'm sure the world would go on a great deal better without them."

She read a few lines, and was interrupted by a loud double knock. "If that isn't too bad!" she cried, angrily. "It's at least an hour before any one has any business to be here, and I shall have to receive them. If it's a man, he'll have nothing to talk about but the weather; and if it's a woman, she'll be full of her last new cook or her babies. I'll hide the book. I don't believe there'll be any one here to-night with whom I should care to talk about it, even to find fault. Ugh! it's a man, I know, by the step. I only hope Mrs. Towers's sense of propriety will take the alarm, and send her down to my rescue at once."

The door opened, and Kate turned her head towards the new-comer, as the butler announced Mr. Horton.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. LAWRENCE HORTON.

A MAN still under middle age, and a man who had not spent his youth so rashly as to make him look older than his years, well dressed, with the air and manner of one who knew how to make the best of all that had been given him,—easy, pleasant, polished, evidently a man with whom the world went well, and perhaps one to whom this world, as yet, had given so much that he had never asked if another could not give him more,—a man thoroughly satisfied with himself and his belongings, as one might easily be with whom things went always well.

He was a little above the tone of the guests that Mrs. Towers expected that night.

Kate saw that in an instant as he came towards her, and, with a slight but courteous gesture acknowledging her presence, made a remark on the weather, and followed it by one which showed that his visit bore reference to Mr. Towers.

“He went to Leeds the day before yesterday,” observed Kate, “and will be back to-morrow.”

Mr. Horton looked a little surprised. “I came by appointment, too. A matter of business, which Mr. Towers thought might as well be transacted at his house as at his office. Can I have made a mistake as to the day? I have his note about me.”

“I remember now, I wrote it for him,” observed Katherine; “but I thought the appointment was for the 15th.”

“The 13th — or can I have made a mistake in the figures?” And he handed the note to her.

"It's my dreadful writing that is answerable for it all," said Kate, laughing; "any one might take this 5 for a 3. I really don't know how to apologize to you for my carelessness. Please let me burn the note, of which I am quite ashamed."

Mr. Horton smiled a negative, and with a little *empressement*, as if it were something too precious to be parted with, put the note carefully back in his pocket-book.

"I must call on Mr. Towers next Friday. I cannot regret the mistake that permits me so soon to repeat my visit here."

Kate understood perfectly that she was the cause of that pleasure. The look Mr. Horton gave her was sufficiently explanatory, and she took the compliment with some graciousness. He was well dressed, not bad looking, and the diamond ring on his little finger was a very handsome one. As he *was* there, Mrs. Towers might as

well ask him to spend the evening; he would be better worth talking to than any of the guests who were invited. Mr. Horton seemed very willing to be asked,—perhaps it struck him, too, that as he was there, it would be only civil to remain till the lady of the house made her appearance,—at any rate, a few minutes might be spent much more unpleasantly than in company with a girl so handsome as the one before him. And she puzzled Mr. Horton, too. He was accustomed to young ladies, nay, was rather popular with them—as a good-looking man, with a fair income, and still in the prime of life, was likely to be. But the young lady before him, with that straight, fearless outlook in her eyes, who spoke to him so coolly and frankly, who neither blushed, simpered, nor turned away when he complimented her, but took his homage—and Mr. Horton's manner had conveyed a great deal

—as a thing of course, was something very different from the young ladies with whom he had hitherto come in contact. What should he talk to her about? Did she read much? He was not a reading man, but she looked as if she were a reading girl, and she would soon find him out if he went beyond his depth. There were the pictures on the walls—they would be safe, at any rate; besides, he went to the Academy every year, and knew all the leading artists, at least by name; they would do to begin with. So he directed her attention to a charming water-colour landscape. (Mr. Towers had given his wife at least half-a-dozen grey hairs by the manner in which he had decorated his walls; for, as she said to herself, chromo-lithographs were so beautifully done now, and engravings so good and cheap, a set of either, all framed to match, would have answered the purpose quite as well, as

a tenth part of the money.) Kate praised it, as she was expected to do, but added,—
“I know very little of modern paintings, but I believe Mr. Towers’s collection is considered a very fine one.”

“He has spared no expense in forming it, if that is a criterion; but perhaps you prefer the old masters.”

“I can’t say I prefer them, but I scarcely saw anything else till I came here. Mr. Towers’s are certainly brighter and pleasanter to look at than ours at home.”

“Family portraits?” asked Mr. Horton.
“Ah! certainly nothing can equal them in interest.” He spoke as if he had a whole gallery in his own house, instead of his only possession in that way being a couple of photographs of his mother and father, and a painting of his grandfather in oils, executed after the fashion which we sometimes used to see in a parlour window in a fifth-rate street,

with "This style, five guineas." Kate, who had been surrounded with ancestral likenesses from her cradle, but thought little of them, for the faded glories of her house did not matter much to her in the humiliations caused by its present poverty, replied simply,—
"Yes, most of them—dingy old horrors! with all sorts of dreadful stories connected with them, and a few, besides, brought from Italy by one of the Randals, who turned picture fancier in the time of Charles the First. I know they're all dreadfully in want of cleaning now; and as to the frames, they're nearly as black as the pictures."

Mr. Horton felt his interest in this young lady redoubled. He was a new man, and could not, for his life, have told who his great-grandfather was; in fact, he would much rather have dispensed with the knowledge,—it might have been more curious than gratifying,—but, to her, ancestors seemed every-day

matters ; and it appeared a perfectly natural thing for her to be able to count her kin two centuries back. Mr. Horton was a new man—a very new man, indeed, and he had all that respect for antiquity which the knowledge that it was one of the few things his purse could not buy was likely to give him. But he did not care to speak more of the pictures now ; he could boast of no collection formed two hundred years ago, and, therefore, he turned the conversation to the china on a console table. Mr. Towers had purchased the ornaments at a price which his wife did not dare to guess at, and his Dresden and Sèvres did his taste credit.

“ Yes, that *is* pretty ! ” said Kate, warmly, “ those flower - vases in particular. They really are my ideal of what china should be—bright in colour and elegant in form. They are a positive treat to me after the old monstrosities in our own drawing-room at home..

Hideous dragons, fit for nothing but to frighten children with; great jars with all kinds of unsightly monsters sprawling, in every conceivable colour, over their surface. I think it was my great-great-grandmother who formed this collection, and there's not a single pretty or useful thing in it all but two claret beakers, with our arms painted on them, and I carried *them* off to my own room for flower-vases. They *do* look passable when filled with roses."

"Your house must be a perfect museum of ancient curiosities," remarked Mr. Horton, wondering how he could find out where that house was.

"No, it isn't,—not more than any other old place in the neighbourhood. We're all old at that part of the world, and I like things new and fresh myself. Age seems to me only another word for dinginess and decay. I think, when houses have lasted a certain time,

they ought to fall to pieces of themselves. Ours is called The Grange, and I never walked in the grounds of an evening, looking on the dreary, grey old place, without thinking of the one described by Tennyson. Ours had a moat, too, once on a time, but it was filled up in the time of Charles the Second. I don't believe it was half drained, though, when they did it, for the lower rooms are as damp as possible. You don't know what a pleasant change it is to come to a house like this, with all the modern improvements in drainage, ventilation, and gas."

"I can hardly realize that; my *penchant* is for antiquity," said Mr. Horton, whose surroundings all his life had been of the newest; but he looked on Kate with increased interest, mingling with a little awe. She lived at The Grange, a place which must have been ancient even in the time of the last Charles. She was not talking large either. Mr. Horton belonged

to a set who were in the habit of doing so, and he indulged in the practice himself at times—quite enough not to make him too ready to believe all the assertions of others. Mrs. Towers came in now, full of *empressement* and geniality. She was quite pleased with the mistake which had brought Mr. Horton there; he must stay now he had come. They only expected a few friends—just a little *impromptu* dance. He knew how fond she was of such friendly gatherings, and he must come again on the 15th, when Mr. Towers would be at home, and dine with them. Mr. Horton accepted both invitations. He had been present at similar entertainments to that to which he was invited to remain, and his recollection of them was not such as to make him care for a repetition of Mrs. Towers's hospitality when her husband was from home. But he wished to see more of the young lady before him, and ascertain where The Grange



was of which she spoke ; and he was very ready to come to dinner on the 15th, as Mr. Towers would himself be at home then, and a guest would be sure of a good if plain dinner, and of wine that was more than drinkable.

Kate was very thankful that he stayed. He was, at least, better than the other people who came. He was not particularly clever, but he appeared well-bred and tolerably amusing ; and, the next Friday, she was equally well pleased to see him at dinner, and on this visit had taken care *not* to select the most unbecoming dress in her wardrobe. Mr. Horton was sufficiently agreeable to be worth dressing for, even if Mrs. Towers had not dropped several hints as to his eligibility as a husband.

Indeed, poor Mrs. Towers, with all her good nature, would have been glad to have seen Kate married off her hands, and, unless

she did marry, she was likely to remain on them; and it had been the sudden thought how very pleasant it would be if Mr. Horton were to fall in love with her charge that had prompted the invitation she had given him. Perhaps Mr. Orton suspected this, but he was not at all disposed to find fault with Mrs. Towers if he did. He knew his own value; why should he blame her for knowing it too? He was thirty-five, and for the last twelve years had been considered, by those amongst whom she visited, a good match. But it had not pleased him hitherto to marry; he had told his friends, with a proud humility, that he could not afford it. Of late he had said so less frequently, and had begun to consider the possibilities of forming an establishment and giving hostages to fortune. Some of his more intimate friends suspected that he had the establishment, and, after a kind, had given the hostages

already. But there was nothing in Mr. Horton's outward bearing to justify such a suspicion. He was always pleasant-mannered, facile, and agreeable; but his mode of life, his manner and bearing, were all, outwardly at least, decorous, and in the highest degree respectable. He had apartments at a tradesman's at the West End for which he paid a hundred a year. He could have got much better rooms in a far healthier locality at half the rent, but they would not have been so fashionable. He rode in Rotten Row every Saturday; and if he took care to let his friends know that fact, and also the value of the horse he rode, why, Mr. Horton only copied some others who, at least, might have had the sense to know better. He dressed well and carefully, and paid his tailor ready money. He went to church every Sunday morning, and, choosing to be as fashionable in his devotions as in his abode or his dress, had selected a chapel-of-

ease to pay them in, where he could worship in company with duchesses, and see countesses alight at the doors of the temple. He fulfilled all the relations of life in a most exemplary manner. His mother had long been dead, but his father's vulgarity had been a source of great annoyance to him, and he really had borne with it in a most dutiful manner. The old gentleman had been very proud of his son, and, if he suspected any little irregularities like those some of his friends had hinted at, never gave him any sharper admonition than a half-jocular caution. When he died, Mr. Horton put on the deepest mourning, and spared no expense either in the funeral or the tombstone. He had several sisters, and an unlimited number of nephews and nieces. As a brother, he was gallantry and courtesy itself, and as an uncle won, and deserved to win, unlimited popularity for his benefactions on



birthdays and at Christmas-time. His reading was neither extensive nor profound. He bought a volume of the Railway Library whenever he started on a journey, and he took in the *Piccadilly* regularly. It was a paper written by "gentlemen for gentlemen," and therefore, Mr. Lawrence Horton thought, peculiarly adapted for him. His father having begun life as a commercial traveller, and ended it as a bill-discounter, the high tone this paper took was peculiarly congenial to Mr. Lawrence Horton's exalted ideas upon most subjects that came in his way.

His life, on the whole, was a pleasant one, as a man's generally is who is on good terms with himself and everybody about him. His income was rapidly increasing, and he was already a sufficiently rich man to entertain, as I have said, some thoughts of changing his condition. When quite a young man, he had made up his mind that he never would

do this, unless after a fashion that he approved. He did not care for money in his wife, but at any rate he would have enough himself to keep her in such style as should be in accordance with his views of comfort. Indeed, he had always set himself down as a marrying man, but only as a marrying man when it should suit his own pleasure to be so. He had no idea of a small *ménage*, with one wretched servant for everything; he was not, he considered, extravagant or *exigeant* in his requirements; but his wife must have the surroundings of a lady, and his children, if ever he had any, be brought up as a gentleman's children should be—he did not think it necessary to add, as the descendants of a commercial traveller. A good house at St. John's Wood or Bayswater; a brougham for his wife—that was indispensable: the lady Mr. Horton honoured with his hand would be far too much of a lady to walk through mud and

mire; a mount for himself—he had no intention of giving up the delights of Rotten Row when he married; a few dinner parties; an annual visit to the Continent, if a family did not come and render such extended travelling difficult and expensive; an occasional visit to the Opera — this was all that Mr. Horton wished to be able to compass when he married, but as much as this was indispensable; and for the last three years he had felt that he could do this, and that he now need only look around for the one thing, without which ten times his income would not make a home, and that was a wife to grace it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BARGAIN MADE.

PERHAPS Mr. Horton had been difficult to please. At any rate, he had looked anxiously round the rather wide circle of his acquaintance, and had not yet found the lady he could feel disposed to honour by allowing her to share the very charming home he had pictured for himself in the future. If money would have satisfied him, money he could have had; if good looks alone would have sufficed, there were plenty of pretty faces ready to smile upon him. But he could dispense with money, and he wanted something more than prettiness. In spite of his appreciation of the *Piccadilly*, his rides in Rotten

Row, and the crest with which the Heralds' College had duly supplied him, he was not quite sure that his position as a gentleman was so fully secure as might be desired; and a wife of an undeniably good family, and of a style and figure that Mr. Horton believed in his heart race alone could bring, might do very much for him. But young ladies of good family were almost as rare as phoenixes in the circle in which Mr. Horton moved; and he had begun to think he must vail his pretensions, and be contented with the daughter of some fifth-rate barrister or M.D., when suddenly Kate Randal came across his path, and he saw in her the realization of all—and more—that he had imagined his future wife should be.

It was easy for him to find out from Mr. Towers all that he wanted; and at the end of the visit he paid on the Friday after he had first seen her, he resolved that, if possible,

Miss Randal should be his wife. He was not in love with her,—it was a very long time since Mr. Horton had been in love with anybody, and his affections, at the best, were of a tepid, lukewarm character; but he admired her greatly. It was not so much her beauty,—he had seen handsomer girls,—but it was the style, the manner, the tone which distinguished her from every other young lady he had met with. And there was no question as to her family. They were not rich,—anything but that; so much the better. Mr. Horton had a dim idea, in spite of all his self-complacency, that if The Grange had been in such state as it was when the old moat was filled up, or when the head of its house had money enough to spare to collect pictures from Italian galleries, he might not have succeeded in his wooing of one of its daughters. He had an excellent opinion of himself personally, but his newness weighed on him at



times, and he would have liked a wife at the head of his table who could talk to others, as Kate Randal had talked to him, of the belongings of her father's ancient house. He would like to see his wife, too, wear the rich dresses with which it would be his pride to adorn her as Kate Randal wore her simpler ones. He would like his wife to have that proud, cold bearing that she had—so careless of pleasing, so stately in its indifference to the opinions of others,—showing unconsciously, in every word and gesture, that her own will was law enough to guide her.

He would win this Kate, this queen of Kates, or buy her, if she was to be bought,—he did not much care which way it went so long as he obtained her; and she should rule his house, and shine in his home, the most costly, and therefore the best prized thing it held. So he resolved; and it was not long before both Mrs. Towers and Kate saw for

what purpose Mr. Horton came so frequently to Russell Square.

What did the girl think of her wooer? As it would be better that a girl should lie in her coffin, stretched fairly out for maiden burial, than she should think of her future husband. She was as ready to sell as he was to buy, only she must have her full price. She was very well satisfied with Mr. Horton on the whole, and, after the fashion she had told her sister, she would do her duty by him. She never once asked herself if she could love him,—there was no mention of it in the bond. She would be true to him, as a matter of course—when had the women of her race gone wrong?—but there was no need of love to keep her so. She would be able to walk her own path without such aid. It was not such a marriage as she ought to have made; she felt that very bitterly; but, under her present circumstances, with the

blight that her father had brought upon her name, it was the best thing she could do. Anything would be better than a return to The Grange,—almost anything better than a continuance of her life in Russell Square, which she had only embraced as a prelude to something better. Mr. Horton was rich—Mr. Towers was very explicit on that point; and Kate, like him, had her own ideas of what her future home should be. She would have as many beautiful things around her as his money could buy; she would dress handsomely, and receive his friends gracefully. She was afraid some of them were vulgar. Well, she would weed them out, and form new ones of her own. Her own family connexions might recognize her in her new life; and she smiled to herself as she thought how pleased Mr. Horton would be with such recognitions. She would see if he could not do something for the boys as they

grew older. Like her, they must be content to let their lives flow in other tracks than those which former Randals had filled. And she would have Milly to see her, when, perhaps, some one else might put Harry Corder out of her thoughts. And if she could prevent it, her father should never enter house of hers, to bring the shame on it that he had done on his own. Never a thought of the vileness of the self-barter she was making crossed her mind, but many a one that it should be made with Mr. Lawrence Horton, bill-broker and *parvenu*, instead of with a gentleman of long descent and good position such as other Randals had mated with. It was for *this* that she could not forgive her father. Under any circumstances, she would have sold herself; but it might have been for a coronet, and to be queen of a county. It was impossible to forget that though she might still have made a

bargain instead of a marriage, it might have been for terms to which all that Mr. Lawrence Horton could offer was as nothing.

But she never relented—she never turned back. She had made up her mind to do this thing, because, under the circumstances, it was the best thing to be done. Of its wickedness she had no thought,—there was nothing else, she considered, she could do. Mr. Towers tried to make the girl open her heart to him; he was not quite satisfied with Mrs. Towers's assurances that all was as it should be, and that Kate was as much in love with Mr. Horton as a girl had any business to be. Kate did not appear to him a girl likely to be very much in love with any one; but he would have liked to be sure that she at least esteemed and respected the man to whom she had been so ready to promise herself. But he could

obtain no assurance on this point. After all, it was a difficult thing for a man to do. Kate seemed happy, thoroughly satisfied with her future and her intended; and, therefore, all that now remained for Mr. Towers to do was to make her a very liberal present for her outfit, and promise that the wedding-breakfast should be at his house. Mr. Horton would have preferred its being at The Grange, but that would have been too far for his friends to go to it; still, as that could not be, the next best thing was to have the master of The Grange in Russell Square; and Mr. Randal was very ready to grace his daughter's wedding with his presence,—far more ready than Kate was to have him there.

He looked his part well, and Mr. Horton was thoroughly satisfied with his new relative. Even Mr. Randal's borrowing fifty pounds of him before he returned was a very

slight alloy to the satisfaction this superb father-in-law gave him. Mr. Randal borrowed a larger sum of Mr. Towers, but he had an instinctive feeling that it would not do to tax his daughter's husband too heavily at first. Then he went back to The Grange and to Milly, who had been left at home, partly because Mr. Randal did not choose to incur the expense of bringing her to town, and partly because he fully recognized her usefulness in keeping the boys and the servants in order during his absence. And Kate Randal went on her new path and began her new life, as aimless and as God-forgetting a one as if such things as truth, honour, and the love that binds men and women together, and throws a sacredness around the daily life, and hallows and ennobles the meanest trials, the commonest events, were but so many unmeaning words. Forsworn and self-sold, would she ever wake

to find the true meaning of all that she had promised?—would she ever learn that she had that in her to give which it might be madness and sin in the coming years to bestow on any but the husband who might never claim them?

CHAPTER XIX.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

MRS. HORTON was at home, and her home, if only a house, was a well-appointed and well-furnished one. Mr. Horton had spared no expense to make it so. It was one of the handsomest villas in Bayswater, and as gay and as bright as stucco, and compo, and flowers contracted for with the nurseryman, could make it externally; and as dazzling as buhl and gilding, chintz and satin, could make it within. Kate was thoroughly satisfied so far, and there was something better in this home, or rather house, of hers (for men and women who begin life as she and her husband had done can never be said to have a home); it was not *all* gilding and buhl, satin and chintz.

The pictures were good—Mr. Towers had chosen them ; and the library was furnished with books as well as with leather-covered tables and an inkstand ; and the books were of her own choosing, as was everything the drawing-rooms contained.

She had protested against St. John's Wood as too out-of-the-way. Mr. Horton thought that by that she meant him to understand that none of her own relations could be expected to visit her there, while the real truth was, though Kate did not think it necessary to state it, that she felt, in St. John's Wood, she should be too near his ; and it was much better, every way better, thought Kate,—she was improving wonderfully in worldly wisdom,—to see as little of them as was consistent with those friendly terms which it is always so desirable to maintain between members of the same family. She did not like them, and they were not disposed to be

too fond of her. Both of Mr. Horton's sisters were a little afraid of his wife, and more than a little jealous of her. One, in her way, was a fine lady, the other a great one; and their fineness and their greatness seemed alike thrown away upon Kate. She was not half-sympathizing enough with Mrs. Mordaunt Flint's ill health—when her husband set up his brougham, Mrs. Mordaunt had thought herself justified in setting up as an invalid—and she was not disposed to be patronized by Mrs. Thomas Green, whose *forte* it was to be either petting the people she did like, or snubbing those she did not. She would have liked, for her brother's sake, to have petted Kate, but the young lady was not of the material that *protégées* are made of; and as to snubbing Mrs. Thomas Green was a bold woman, but to snub Mrs. Horton was more than even she dared do.

Kate was civil to them both, but, as they

said in confidence to each other, anything but sisterly; and they would have liked to be very sisterly indeed with a young lady who came of such a stock as Kate. They had hoped to be invited to The Grange, but no such invitation came. They had quite looked forward to assisting with their husbands at a family party there in the autumn; but Mr. Randal was either sadly inhospitable, or his daughter wilfully obtuse to the hints they gave her on the subject. Mr. Horton had done more than hint, and Kate had given him a decided answer at once. "Papa wouldn't suit your people, and they wouldn't suit him. It might be all very well for a little time, but neither they nor you could long get on at The Grange."

She had never concealed from him the fact that Mr. Randal had lost the greater part of his property; but it is one

thing to speak of ruined fortunes in words, and another to let their decadence be clearly brought before the eyes of those who are accustomed to estimate everything by its money value. No humiliation Kate had ever yet experienced could have equalled that which she would have felt if once the cold eyes of her husband—eyes which some one had once said looked as if they belonged to a born broker and appraiser—looked on the faded plenishing, the decay, and the neglect of her old home. But if she revolted against his seeing all this, it would have been ten times worse for those women, whose only glory seemed to be in the length of their husbands' purses, to see all the shifts, the contrivances, the never-ending struggle, that Milly had to practise in trying to make "both ends meet" over a chasm which seemed as if it could never be bridged by any effort of hers.

Mr. Horton, who knew that the Randals

were poor, but had not the faintest idea *how* poor, did not understand his wife. His father-in-law had made a profound impression upon him. He believed in him thoroughly—that is, he believed him to have been, in his youth, one of the most fashionable men in town. Mr. Randal's was the florid, effulgent George-the-Fourth style, it was true; but that George-the-Fourth style has, in our day, a faded air of *vieille noblesse*, that impresses men of Mr. Horton's stamp very agreeably. He liked his father-in-law's manner and bearing; he liked his stories and his jokes,—even the equivocal flavour of those in which Mr. Randal delighted when ladies were not present. He had lent him money more readily than he had ever lent any one money yet, because he had felt sure, at the time, of receiving full value for that money, even if it were never repaid in the current coin of the realm. Therefore it was a disappointment to Mr.

Horton to be told that he was to see very little of this magnificent pacha of a papa-in-law, and that it was not desirable he should see much of him. He felt that he was not having such a return for the money he had lent Mr. Randal as he had expected, still less for that far larger sum that his matrimonial investment had cost him.

Still there was his wife, if he was not to see much of her father—a wife he had every right to be proud of. There was not one of his acquaintance who could boast of such another. There was no question but that, as far as Kate was concerned, he was receiving full value for his money. He gave several dinner-parties after his marriage, and Kate received her guests and did the honours superbly. He took her to the Opera much more frequently than in his plans of married life he had contemplated doing, and he gave her, what he had never intended to give his

wife, a horse for her own riding. But Kate rode well; and he had the satisfaction of seeing noble, and even royal, eyes turn after her, and the pleasure of talking to his City friends of "the last time my wife and I were in the Row,"—so that he got a great deal out of the horse besides just the pleasure of mounting Kate. Then he took her to his friends' entertainments, where Kate queened it languidly, wondering how long it would be before any of her own relations would take any notice of her, and what they would think of Mr. Horton when they did.

On her part, Kate was not so well satisfied with her bargain as her husband was with his. She liked him, on the whole, less than she had expected to do. She had been ready to take him on a very superficial acquaintance, satisfied that he would fulfil her not very exacting requirements, and now she found that he fell below them. She

had told her sister that she did not look for a gentleman ; but she had never realized till now what it was to live with a man who was not one. Her estimate of Mr. Horton had not been a very high one, but she was beginning to learn that he fell very far below it. She would have been content with good electro-plate that was willing to call itself electro-plate and nothing more ; but Mr. Horton was only copper lacquered over, while he had a persistent belief that he could persuade every one that himself and all his belongings were as good silver as ever issued from the Mint.

He was mean to the very core, in spite of his lavish expenditure on many points. It wrung his very soul to part with a single sixpence from which no equivalent, either in the way of display or a more solid return, could be looked for. There was something so genial in Mrs. Towers's parsimony, and

she so fully believed in economy as the noblest of all virtues, that it might be forgiven her if she acted a little too closely up to her standard of right. Besides, she was so thoroughly good-natured *au fond*, and so anxious to make every one around her happy, that people found it easy to excuse her for liking to make herself happy too by doing it at the smallest possible outlay. But Mr. Horton was *not* good-natured, although he had a certain bland, superficial *bonhomie*, which made shallow observers think him so, and he had the profoundest horror of being supposed anxious to save his purse in any way; while Mrs. Towers was so openly jubilant whenever she had made her ninepence go as far as another person's shilling, that no one (but those who suffered by the saving) could help condoning a weakness which gave her so much satisfaction. Now, Kate might have for-

given her husband's meanness, provided it did not affect herself, which she had not the slightest intention it should do, but found it very hard indeed to forgive the constant attempts of Mr. Horton to make himself and others believe that he was one of the most liberal and open-handed of men.

Still, Kate was improving fast in a certain kind of philosophy. She had married Mr. Horton, and must make the best of him; she was not quite sure that if, from the first, she had known him as fully as she did now, she would not still have married him. He should never show his meanness to her; and she would try and cure him of talking large, by telling him very plainly how excessively underbred she thought it. And she should see very little of him; that was the best, if one did not marry just as one could wish—which she supposed few would be able to do—of having a husband in the City.

She would make a good use of the time thus left at her disposal. She had learned from Mr. Towers how to do that. All the new world of modern literature to which he had introduced her was hers to roam in. Mr. Horton could never accompany her there, he read nothing but his newspaper. But she was quite content to wander alone. The soul that dwelt in Tennyson's Palace of Art sufficed for itself—for a time. And Kate felt herself as self-sufficing and self-reliant.

She had shaped out her own lot, and was content therewith. She would weed out her husband's circle pitilessly, and add the best people of Mr. Towers's to it. She had plenty of means to develop the artistic and literary tastes that had sprung up within her; and with these, and with the society of bright, clever people,—such people as, after her life in Barleigh, it seemed a new revelation of

the world and of herself to know,—what more, as a reasonable creature, not disposed to ask too much of life, nor to find fault with the gods for not having made this world a perfect Elysium, could she ask ?

On one thing Kate Horton never reckoned—that she might one day find something had aroused within her, which neither the commonplace luxuries of her daily life could satisfy, nor all this new intellectual aliment, which she was so readily devouring, appease.

Not a woman of her race had ever yet gone wrong,—the possibility that she could do so had never crossed her thoughts ; had it done so, it would have been rejected with incredulous scorn. But she had never asked herself if all these women had sinned as she had sinned, and, if so, what silent years of voiceless suffering and unspoken shame might have been meted out to them.

Kate Randal had made her bargain, and,

as she thought, was prepared to pay all that the bond required, but she had yet to learn there might be more required than she had ever dreamed of.

She was only a girl as yet. What would the years bring when they ripened her into woman?

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY E. J. FRANCIS AND CO.
TOOK'S COURT AND WINE OFFICE COURT E.C.





